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Title: The Sentimental Adventures of Jimmy Bulstrode

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Release Date: October 13, 2010 [EBook #34065]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SENTIMENTAL ADVENTURES OF
JIMMY BULSTRODE ***



**The amiable shopman pressed various toys on
monsieur and madame "*pour les enfants*"**

The Sentimental Adventures of Jimmy Bulstrode

BY

MARIE VAN VORST

**With Illustrations by
ALONZO KIMBALL**

**NEW YORK
HURST & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS**

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Published March, 1908

**TO THE MEMORY
OF
H. E. TESCHEMACHER**

CONTENTS

THE FIRST ADVENTURE

In which he buys a Christmas tree

THE SECOND ADVENTURE

In which he tries to buy a portrait

THE THIRD ADVENTURE

In which he finds there are some things which one cannot buy

THE FOURTH ADVENTURE

In which he makes three people happy

THE FIFTH ADVENTURE

In which he makes nobody happy at all

THE SIXTH ADVENTURE

In which he discards a knave and saves a queen

THE SEVENTH ADVENTURE

In which he becomes the possessor of a certain piece of property

THE EIGHTH ADVENTURE

In which he comes into his own

ILLUSTRATIONS

From drawings by ALONZO KIMBALL

*The amiable shopman pressed various toys on monsieur and madame
"pour les enfants" Frontispiece*

"I only like him like a kind, kind friend"

In the midst of this rabble little Simone was dancing

"I've had a telegram from my husband"

THE FIRST ADVENTURE

I

IN WHICH HE BUYS A CHRISTMAS TREE

There was never in the world a better fellow than Jimmy Bulstrode. If he had been poorer his generousities would have ruined him over and over again. He was always being taken in, was the recipient of hundreds of begging letters, which he hired another soft-hearted person to read. He offended charitable organizations by never passing a beggar's outstretched hand without dropping a coin in it. He was altogether a distressingly impracticable rich person, surrounded by people who admired him for what he really was and by those who tried to squeeze him for what he was worth!

It was a general wonder to people who knew him slightly why Bulstrode had never married. The gentleman himself knew the answer perfectly, but it amused him to discuss the question in spite of the pain, as well as for the pleasure that it caused him to consider—*the reason why*.

Mary Falconer, the woman he loved, was the wife of a man of whom Bulstrode could only think in pitiful contempt. But, thanks to an element of chivalry in the character of the hero of this story the years, as time went on, spread back of both the woman and the man in an honorable series, of whose history neither one had any reason to be ashamed.

Nevertheless, it struck them both as rather humorous, after all, that of the three concerned her husband should be the only renegade and, notwithstanding, profit by the combined good faith of his wife and the man who loved her.

Oh, there was nothing easy in the task that Jimmy set for himself! And it did not facilitate matters that Mary Falconer scarcely ever helped him in the least! She was a beautiful woman, a tender woman, and there were times when her friend felt that she cleverly and cruelly taunted him with Puritanism and with his simple, old-fashioned ideas and crystal clearness of vision, the *culte* he had regarding marriage and the sacred way in which he held bonds and vows. It was no help at all to think she rebelled and jested at his reserve; that she did her best to break it—and there were times when it was a brilliant siege. But down in her heart she respected him, and as she saw around her the domestic wrecks with which the matrimonial seas are encumbered, and knew that her own craft promised to go safely through the storm, Mary Falconer more than once had been grateful to the man.

As far as Bulstrode himself was concerned, each year—there had been ten of them—he found the situation becoming more difficult and dangerous. Not only did the future appear to him impossible as things were, but he began to hate his arid past. He was sometimes led to ask, what, after all, was he getting out of his colossal sacrifice? The only reward he wanted was the woman herself, and, unless her husband died, she would never be his. Bulstrode had not found that he could solve the problem, and now and then he let it go from sheer weariness of heart.

In the face of the window of the drawing-room where Bulstrode sat on this afternoon of an especial winter's day the storm cast wreaths of snow that clung and froze, or dropped like feathers down against the sill. The gentleman had his predilections even in New York, and in the open fireplace the logs crumbled and disintegrated to ashen caves wherein the palpitating jewels of the heat were held. Except for this old-fashioned warmth, there was none other in the room, whose white wainscoting and pillars, low ceilings and quaint chimney-piece, characterized one of those agreeably proportioned houses still to be found in lower New York around Washington Square.

Bulstrode had received about half an hour ago a letter whose qualities and suggestions were something disturbing to him:

"There is such a thing, believe me" (Mary Falconer wrote in the pages which Bulstrode opened to read for the twentieth time), "as the *gloom* of Christmas, Jimmy. People won't frankly own to it. They're afraid of seeming sour and crabbed. But don't you, who are so exquisitely apt to feelings—to other people's feelings,—at once confess it? It attacks the spinster in the bustling winter streets as she is elbowed by some person, exuberantly a mother, and so arrogantly laden with delicious-looking parcels that she is almost a personal Christmas tree herself. I'm confident this 'gloom of Christmas' grips the wretched little beings at toy-shop windows as they stand 'choosin' their never-to-be-realized toys. I'm sure it haunts the vagrant and the homeless in a city fairly redolent of holly and dinners, and where the array of other people's homes is terrifying. And, my dear friend, it is so horribly subtle that no doubt it attacks others whose only grudge is that their hearths are not built for Christmas trees or the hanging of stockings. But these unfortunates are not saying anything aloud, therefore we must not pry!

"There's a jolly house-party on at the Van Schoolings'. We're to go down tomorrow to Tuxedo and pass Christmas night, and you are, of course, asked and wanted. Knowing your dread of these family feasts—possibly from just such a ghost of the gloom—I was sure you would refuse. But it's a wonderful place for a talk or two, and I shall hope you will go—will come, not even follow, but go down with me."

There was more of the letter—there always is more of women's letters. Their minds and pens are so charmingly facile; there is nothing a woman can do better than talk, except to write.

Bulstrode smoked slowly, the pages between his fingers, his thoughts travelling like wanderers towards a home from which a ban had kept them aliens. His eyes drifted to the

beginning of the letter. He wasn't familiar with the homeless vagrant class. His charities to that part of the population consisted in donations to established societies, and haphazard giving called forth by a beggar's extended hand.

If anybody may be immune to the melancholy of which his friend Mrs. Falconer spoke, it should surely be this gentleman, smoking his cigar before the fire. The unopened letters—there was a pile of them—would have offered ample reason why. No one of the lot but bore some testimony to the generous heart which, beneath dinner-jacket and behind the screw-faced watch with the picture in the back of it, beat so healthy and so well.

But the bestowal of benefits, whilst it may beautify the giver, does not always transform itself into the one benefit desired and console the bestower! Bulstrode had a charming home. He was alone in it. He had his clubs where bachelors like himself, more or less infected with Christmas gloom, would be glad to greet him. He had his friends, many of them, and their home circles were complete. His, by force of circumstances, began and ended with himself, and as if triumphant to have found so tempting a victim, the gloom came and possessed Bulstrode as he sat and mused.

But the decided sadness that stole across his face bore no relation, to the season, to whose white mystery and holy beauty there was something in his boyish, kindly heart that always responded.

The sadness Mrs. Falconer's letter awakened would not sleep. What his Christmas *might* be...! He had only to order his motor, to call for her and drive over the ferry; to sit beside her in the train, to drive with her again across the wintry roads. He had but to see her, watch her, talk with her, share with her the day and evening, to have his Christmas as nearly what a feast should be as dreams could ask. The whole festival was there: joy, good-will—peace? No. Not peace for him or for her—not that; everything else, but not that. And he had been travelling for five weary months in order to make himself keep for her that peace a little longer.

Bulstrode sighed here, lifted the letter where there was more of it to his lips—held it out toward the fire as if the red jewels were to set themselves around it, thought differently, and putting it back in its envelope, thrust it in the pocket of his waistcoat.

"Ruggles," he asked the servant who had come in, "you sent the despatch to Tuxedo?"

"Yes, sir."

"There'll be later a note to send. I'll ring. Well, what is it?"

"There's a person at the door, sir, who insists on seeing you."

The servant's tone—one particularly jarring to the ears of a man who had fellowship with more than one class of his kind—made the master look sharply up. Ruggles was a new addition to the household, and Bulstrode did not like him.

"A person," Bulstrode repeated, quietly; "what sort of a person?"

"A man, sir."

"Not a gentleman? No," he nodded gently; "I see you do not think him one. Yet that he is a man is in his favor. There are some gentlemen who aren't men, you know. Let him in."

In doing so Ruggles seemed to let in the night. Bulstrode had, in the warmth of his fragrant room, forgotten that outside was the wintry dark. Ruggles, in letting the man in, had the air of thrusting him in, and shut the door behind the visitor with a click.

The creature himself let in the cold; he seemed made of it. The snow clung to his shoulders; his shoes, tied up with strings, were encrusted with it. His coat, buttoned to his chin, frayed at the cuffs and edges, was thin and weather-stained. He had a pale face, a royal growth of beard—this was all Bulstrode had time to remark. He rose.

"My servant says you want to see me. Come near the fire, won't you?"

The visitor did not stir. Bewildered in the warmth of the room, he stood far back on the edge of the thick rug. To all appearances he was a bit of driftwood from the streets, one of the usual vagrant class who haunt the saloons and park and steer from lockup to night-lodging, until they finally steer themselves entirely off the face of history, and the potter's field gathers them in. Nothing but his entrance into this conventional room before this well-balanced member of decent society was peculiar.

As he still neither moved nor spoke, Bulstrode, approaching him, again invited: "Come near the fire, won't you? and when you are warm tell me what I can do for you."

"It's the storm," murmured the man, and a half-human look came across his face with his words. "I mean to say, it's this hellish storm that's got in my throat and lungs. I can't speak—it's so warm here. It will be better in a second. No, not near the fire; thanks—chilblains." He looked down at his poor feet.

The voice which the storm had beaten and thrashed to painful hoarseness was entirely out of keeping with the man's appearance, and in intonation, accent, and language was a shock to the hearer.

"Don't stand back like that—come into the room." Bulstrode wheeled a chair briskly about. "There; sit down and drink this; it's a mild blend."

"I'm very wet," said the man. "I'll drip on the rug."

"Hang the rug!"

The tramp drained the glass given him at one swallow merely; it appeared to clear his throat and release his speech. He gathered his rags together.

"I beg pardon for forcing myself on you like this, but I fancy I needn't tell you I'm desperate—desperate!" He held out his hand; it shook like a pale ghost's. "I look it, I'm sure. I haven't eaten a meal or slept in a bed for a fortnight. I've begged work and charity. All day I've been shovelling snow, but I'm too weak to work now."

He was being led to a chair. He sank in it. "Before they sent me to the Island I decided to try a ruse. I went into a saloon and opened a directory, and I said, 'The first name I put my finger upon I'll take as good luck, and I'll go and see the person, man or woman. I opened to James Thatcher Bulstrode, 9 Washington Square.' He half smiled; the pale, trembling hand was waving like a pitiful flag, a signal of distress to catch the sight of some bark that might lend aid. "So I came here. When there seemed actually to be some chance of my getting in, why, my courage failed me. I don't expect you to believe my story or to believe anything, except that I am desperate—desperate. It's below zero to-night out there—infernally cold." He took the pin out of the collar turned up around his neck and let his coat fall back. Under it Bulstrode saw he wore a thin flannel shirt. The tramp repeated to himself, as it were, "It's a bad storm."

He looked up in a dazed fashion at his host as if for acceptance of his remark. In the easy chair, half swathed in rags, pitiful in thinness, dripping from shoes and clothes water that the storm had drenched into him, he was a sorry object in the atmosphere of the well-ordered conventional room. The heat and whiskey, the famine and exposure, cast a film across his eyes and brain. He indistinctly saw his host pass into the next room and shut the door behind him.

"By Jove!" he murmured under his breath in wonder find dumb thanks for the shelter. "By Jove!" The stimulant filtered agreeably through him; more charitable than any element with which he had been lately familiar, the fire's heat began to thaw the ice in his bones. He laid his dripping hat on his knees, his thin hands folded themselves over it, his eyes closed. For hours he had shuffled about the streets to keep from freezing. At the charity organization they gave work he was too weak to do; he had not eaten a substantial meal in so long that he had forgotten the taste of food and had ceased to crave it. In the soft light of lamp and fire he fell into a doze. Bulstrode, if he had stolen softly in to look at his visitor, would have seen a man not over thirty years of age, although want and dissipation added ten to his appearance. He would have been quick to take note of the fine, delicately cut face under the disfiguring beard, and of the slender, emaciated body deformed by its rags.

Possibly he did so noiselessly come in and stand by the unconscious creature, but the sleeping vagabond, dreaming fitful, half-painful things, was ignorant of the visitor. Finally across his mind's sharp despair came a sense of warmth and comfort, and in its spell he awoke.

A servant, not the one who had thrust him into the drawing-room, but another with a friendly face, stood at his side, and in broken English asked the guest of Bulstrode to follow him; and gathering his scattered senses together and picking up his rags and what was left of himself, the creature obeyed a summons which he supposed was to hale him again into the winter streets.

It was some three hours later that Bulstrode in his dining-room entertained his singular guest.

"I have asked you to dine with me," he explained, with a certain graciousness, as if he claimed, not gave, a favor, "as I'm all alone to-night. It's Christmas eve, you know—or perhaps you've been more or less glad to forget it?"

The young man who took the chair indicated him was unrecognizable as the stranger who had staggered into 9 Washington Square three or four hours before. Turned out in spotless linen and a good suit that fitted him fairly well, shaven face save for a mustache above his lip, bathed, brushed, refreshed by nourishment and sleep and repose, he looked like one who has been in the waters, possibly a long, long time; like one who has drifted, been bruised, shattered, and beaten, but who has nevertheless drifted to shore; and in spite of his borrowed clothes, his scarred, haggard face, he looked like a gentleman, and Bulstrode from the moment he spoke had recognized him as one.

The food was a feast to the stranger, in spite of nourishment already given him by Prosper. He restrained the ferocious hunger that woke at sight and smell of the good things, forced

himself not to cry out with eagerness, not to tear and grasp the eatables off the plate, not to devour like a beast. Every time he raised his eyes he met those of the butler Ruggles, and as quickly the stranger looked away. The face of the servant standing by the sideboard, back of him the white and gleaming array of the Bulstrode family silver like piles of snow, was for some reason or other not a pleasant face; the stranger did not think it so.

Once again seated in the room he had entered in his outcast state, a cup of coffee at his hand, a cigar between his lips, the agreeable atmosphere of the old room and its charming objects, the kindly look on the face of his host, all swam before him. Looking frankly at Bulstrode, he said, not without grace of manner:

"I give it up. I can't—it's not to be made out or understood..."

"Do you," interrupted the other, "feel equal to talking a little: to telling me how it happens that you are wandering, as you seem to be? For from the moment you first spoke——"

The young man nodded. "I'm a gentleman. It's worse somehow—I don't know why, but it is."

Bulstrode thought out for him: "It's like remembering agreeable places to which you feel you will never return. Only," he quickly offered, "in your case you must, you know, go back."

"No," said the young man, quietly.

There was so much entire renunciation in what he said that the other could not press it.

"Better still, you can then go on?"

The vagrant looked at his companion as if to say: "Since I've known you—seen you—I have thought that I might." But he said nothing more, and Bulstrode, reading a diffidence which did not displease him, finished:

"You shall go on, and I'll help you."

The stranger bowed his head, and the wine sent the color up until his cheeks took the flush of health. Remaining a little bent over, his eyes on his feet clad in Bulstrode's shoes, he said:

"I'm an Englishman. My family is everything that's decent and all *that*, you know, and proud. We've first-rate traditions. I'm a younger son, and I've always been a thorn in the family's side. I've been a sort of vagabond from the first, but never as bad as they thought or believed."

He paused. His recital was painful to him. Bulstrode waited, then knocking off the ash from his cigar, urged:

"Tell me about it, tell me frankly; it will, you see, be a relief. We can do better that way—if I know."

The stranger looked up at him quickly, then leaning forward in his chair, talked as it were to the carpet, and rapidly:

"It's just a year ago. I'd been going it rather hard and got into trouble more or less—lost at cards and the races, and been running up a lot of bills. My father was awfully down on me. I'd gone home for the holidays and had a talk with my father and asked him to pay up for me just this once more. He refused, and we got very angry, both of us, and separated in a rage. The house was full of people—a Christmas ball and a tree. My father had, so it happened, quite a lot of money in the house. I knew where it was—I had seen him count it and put it away. That night for some reason the whole thing sickened me, in the mess I was in, and I left and went up to London without even saying good-by. In the course of the week my brother came and found me drunk in my rooms. It seems that the money had been taken from my father's safe, and they accused me."

"But," interrupted Bulstrode, eagerly, "it was a simple thing to exculpate yourself."

Ignoring his remark, the other continued: "I have never seen my father since that night."

No amount of former deception can persuade a man that he is a lame judge of character. The young Englishman's emaciated face, where eyes spoiled by dissipation looked out at his companion, was to this impulsive reader of humanity a good face. Bulstrode, however, saw what he wanted to see in most people. Given a chance to study them, or rather further to know them intimately, he might indeed have ended by finding in some cases a few of the imagined qualities. Here misery was evident, degradation as well, timidity, and hesitation,—but honesty? Bulstrode fancied that its characters were not effaced, and he helped the recital:

"Since you so left your people?"

"The steady go down!" acknowledged the other. "I worked my passage to the States on a liner—I stoked..."

"Any chap," encouraged the gentleman, "who can do that can pull himself, I should say, out of a worse hole."

"There's scarcely a bad habit I haven't had down in the hole with me," confessed the other, "and they've held me there."

They both remained for a few seconds without speaking, and the host's eyes wandered to where, over his mantel-shelf, in a great gold frame was the portrait of a lady done by Baker. A quaint young lady in her early teens, with bare arms and frilled frock. She had Bulstrode's eyes. By her side was the black muzzle of a great hound, on whose head the little hand rested. Under the picture, from a silver bowl of roses, came a fragrance that filled the room, and, close by stood a photograph of another lady, very modern, very mocking, and very lovely.

Bulstrode, delicately drawing inferences from the influences in his life, and, if not consciously grateful, reflecting them charmingly, broke the silence:

"You must have formed some plan or other in your mind when you came to my door? What, in the event of your being received, did you intend to ask me to do?"

The stranger lifted his head and his response was irrelevant: "It seems a hundred years since I stood there in that storm and your man pulled me in. I haven't seen a place like this for long, not the inside of decent houses. When I left the ship I managed to get down with a chap as far as Florida, where he had an orange-plantation, but the venture fell through. I fancy the rest is as well forgotten. When I came in here to-night I intended to ask you for a Christmas gift of money, and I should have gone out and drunk myself to hell."

"You spoke"—Bulstrode fetched him back—"of your father and your brother; was there no one else?"

The younger man looked up without reply.

"There has been, then, no more kindly influence in your life—no sister—no woman?"

Bulstrode brought out the words; in his judgment they meant so very much. He saw a change cross the other's face.

"I fancy there are not many men who haven't had a woman in their lives for good or bad," he said, with a short laugh.

"Well," urged the gentleman, gently, "and for what was this woman?"

As if he repelled the insistence, the young fellow stammered:

"I say, this putting a fellow on the rack——"

But Bulstrode leaned forward in his chair and rested his hand on his companion's knee and pleaded:

"Speak out frankly—frankly—I believe I shall understand; it will free your heart to speak. This influence which to a man should be the best—the best—what was it to you?" Bulstrode sat back and waited, and the other man seemed quite lost in melancholy meditations for some few seconds. Then Bulstrode put it: "For a young man, no matter how wild, to leave his home under the misapprehension you claim:—for him to make no effort to reinstate himself: with no attempt at justice: for him to become a wanderer—there must be an extraordinary reason, almost an improbable one——"

"I don't ask you to hear," said the vagrant, quickly.

"I wish to do so. It would have been a simple matter to exculpate yourself—you had not the funds in your possession, had never had them. You took no means to clear yourself?"

"None."

Bulstrode looked hard at the face his care had revealed to him: the deep eyes, the neck, chin, the sensitive mouth—there was a certain distinction about him in his borrowed clothes.

"Where is the woman now?"

"She married my brother—she is Lady Waring—my name," tardily introduced the stranger, "is Cecil Waring."

Bulstrode bowed. "Tell me something of her, in a word—in a word."

"Well, she is always clever," said the young man, slowly, "always very beautiful, and then very poor."

"Yes," nodded Bulstrode.

"She is like the rest of us—one of a fast wild set—a——"

"A gambler?" Bulstrode helped the description.

"She played," acknowledged the young man, "as the rest do—bridge."

"Were you engaged to her, Waring?"

"Yes," he slowly acknowledged, as if each word hurt him.

"And did she believe you guilty?"

"I think," said the other, with an inscrutable expression, "she could not have done so."

"But she let you go under suspicion?"

"Yes."

"Without a word of good faith, of comfort?"

"Yes."

"Did she know of your embarrassments?"

"Too well."

"You tell me she was poor and—possibly she had embarrassments of her own?"

"Possibly."

Bulstrode came over to him.

"Was she at the Christmas ball that night?"

The young man rose as well, his eyes on his questioner's; the color had all left his face—he appeared fascinated—then he shook himself and unexpectedly laughed.

"No," he said; "oh no."

The older man bowed his head and replied, quite inaptly:

"I understand!"

He took a turn across the room.

The few steps brought him in front of the mantel and the photograph of the modern lady in her furs and close hat. He stood and met the fire of her mocking eyes.

"And you *believe* him, Jimmy!" he could hear her say in her delicious voice.

"Yes," he mentally told her, "I believe him."

"You think that to save a woman's name and honor he has become an outcast on the face of the earth ... Jimmy!"

He still gently replied to her:

"Men who love, you know, have but one code—the woman and honor."

Still mocking, but gentle as would have been the touch of the roses in the bowl near the photograph, her voice told him,

"Then he's worth saving, Jimmy."

Worth saving ... he agreed, and turned to his guest. In doing so he saw that Ruggles had come into the drawing-room to remove the coffee-tray.

"Beg pardon, sir, but you mentioned there would be a letter to send shortly?"

"By Jove! so I did!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "I beg your pardon; will you excuse me while I write a line at the desk?" The line was an order to the florist.

For some reason the eyes of the Englishman had not quitted the butler's face, and Ruggles, with cold insolence, had stared at him in turn. Waring, albeit in another man's clothes, fed and seated before a friendly hearth, and once again within the pale of his own class, had regained something of his natural air and feeling of superiority. He resented the servant's insolence, and his face was angrily flushed as Bulstrode gave his orders, and the man left the room.

"I must go away," he said, rather brusquely. "I can never thank you for what you have done. I feel as if I had been in a dream."

"Sit down." His companion ignored his words. "Sit down."

"It's late."

"For what, my friend?"

"I must find some place to sleep."

"You have found it," gently smiled Bulstrode. "Your room is prepared for you here." Then he interrupted: "No thanks—no thanks. If what you tell me is all I think it is, I'm proud to share my roof with you, Waring."

"Don't think well of me—don't!" blurted out the other. "You don't know what a ruined vagabond I am. When you send me out to-morrow I shall begin again; but let me tell you that although I've herded with tramps and thieves, been in the hospital and lock-up, and worked in the hell of a furnace in a ship's hold, nothing hurt me any more, not after I left England—not after those days when I waited in Liverpool for a word—for a sign—not after that, all you see the marks of now—nothing hurts now but the memory. I'm immune."

"You will feel differently—you will humanize."

"Never!" exclaimed the tramp.

"To-night," said Bulstrode, simply.

Waring looked at him curiously.

"What a wonderful man!" he half murmured. "I was led to you by fate: you have forced me to lay my soul bare to you—and now..."

"Let's look things in the face together," suggested the gentleman, practically. "I have a ranch out West. A good piece of property. It's in the hands of a clever Englishman and promises well. How would you like to go out there and start anew? He'll give you a welcome, and he's a first-rate business man. Will you go?"

Waring had with his old habit thrust his hands in his pockets. He stood well on his feet. Bulstrode remarked it. He looked meditatively down between the soles of his shoes.

"You mean to say you give me a chance—to—to——"

"Begin anew, Waring."

"I drink a great deal," said the young man.

"You will swear off."

"I've gambled away all the money I ever had."

"You will be taking care of mine, and it will be a point of honor."

"I'm under a cloud——"

"Not in my eyes," said Bulstrode, stoutly.

"—which I can never clear."

Bulstrode made a dismissing gesture.

"I should want the chap out there to know the truth."

"The truth," caught his hearer, and the other as quickly interrupted:

"To know under what circumstances I left my people."

"No, that is unnecessary," said Bulstrode, firmly. "Nobody has any right to your past. I don't know his. That's the beauty of the plains—the freshness of them. It's a new start—a clean page."

Still the guest hesitated.

"I don't believe it's worth while. You see, I've batted about now so much alone, with nobody near me but the lowest sort; I've given in so long, with no care to do better, that I haven't any confidence in myself. I don't want you to see me fail, sir,—I don't want to go back on you."

Bulstrode had heard very understandingly part of the man's word, part of his excuse for his weakness.

"That's it," he said, musingly. "Butting about alone. It's that—loneliness—that's responsible for so many things."

Looking up brightly as his friend whose derelict dangerous vessel, so near to port and repair, was heading for the wide seas again, Bulstrode wondered: "If such a thing could be that some friend, not too uncongenial, could be found to go with you and stand as it were by you—some friend who knew—who comprehended——"

Waring laughed. "I haven't such a one."

"Yes," said the older gentleman, "you have, and he will stand by you. I'll go West with you myself to-morrow—on Christmas day. I need a change. I want to get away for a little time."

Waring drew back a step, for Bulstrode had risen. Cold Anglo-Saxon as he was, the unprecedented miracle this gentleman presented made him seem almost lunatic. He stared blankly.

"It's simpler than it looks." Bulstrode attempted conventionally to shear it of a little of its eccentricity. "There's every reason why I should look after my property out there. I've never seen it at all."

"I'm not worth such a goodness," Waring faltered, earnestly,— "not worth it."

"You will be."

"Don't hope it."

"I believe it," smiled the gentleman; "and at all events I'll stand by you till you are—if you'll say the word."

Waring, whose lips were trembling, repeated vaguely, "The *word*?"

"Well," replied Bulstrode, "you might say those—they're as good any—will you stand by *me* —?"

Making the first hearty spontaneous gesture he had shown, the young man seized the other's outstretched hand. "Yes," he breathed; "by Heaven! I will!"

It was past midnight when Bulstrode, pushing open the curtains of his bedroom, looked out on the frozen world of Washington Square, where of tree and arch not an outline was visible under the disguising snow; and above, in the sky swept clear of clouds by the strongest of winds, rode the round full disk of the Christmas moon.

The adoption of a vagrant, the quixotic decision he had taken to leave New York on Christmas day, the plain facts of the outrageous folly his impulsiveness led him to contemplate, had relegated his more worldly plans to the background. Laying aside his waistcoat, he took out the letter in whose contents he had been absorbed when Cecil Waring crossed the threshold of his drawing-room.

Well ... as he re-read at leisure her delightful plan for Christmas day, he sighed that he could not do for them both better than to go two thousand miles away! "Waring thinks himself a vagrant—and so, poor chap, he has been; but there are vagrants of another kind." Jimmy reflected he felt himself to be one of these others, and was led to speculate if there were many outcasts like himself, and what ultimately, if their courage was sufficient to keep them banished to the end, would be the reward?

"Since," he reflected, "there's only one thing I desire—and it's the one thing forbidden—I fail sometimes to quite puzzle it out!"

He had finished his preparations for the night and was about to turn out the light, when, with his hand on the electric button, he paused, for he distinctly heard from downstairs what sounded like a call—a cry.

Taking his revolver from the top drawer, he went into the hall, to feel a draft of icy air blow up the staircase, to see over the balusters the open door of the dining-room and light within it, and to hear more clearly the sounds that had come to him through closed doors declare themselves to be scuffling—struggling—the half-cry of a muffled voice—a fall, then Bulstrode started.

"I'm coming," he declared, and ran down the stairs like a boy.

On the dining-room floor, close to the window wide open to the icy night, lay a man's form, and over him bent another man cruelly, with all the animus of a bird of prey.

The under man was Ruggles, Bulstrode's butler, his eyes starting from their sockets, his mouth open, his color livid; he couldn't have called out, for the other man had seized his necktie, twisted it tight as a tourniquet around the man's gullet, and so kneeling with one knee on his chest, Waring held the big man under.

"I say," panted the young man, "can you lend a hand, sir? I've got him, but I'm not strong enough to keep him."

Bulstrode thought his servant's eyes rolled appealingly at him. He cocked his revolver, holding it quietly, and asked coolly:

"What's the matter with him that he needs to be kept?"

"Would you sit on his chest, Mr. Bulstrode?"

"No," said that gentleman. "I'll cover him so. What's the truth?"

"I heard a queer noise," panted the Englishman, "and came out to see what it was, and this fellow was just getting through the window. There was another chap outside, but he got away. I caught this one from the back, otherwise I could never have thrown him."

"You're throttling him."

"He deserves it."

"Let him up."

"Mr. Bulstrode...!"

"Yes," said that gentleman, decidedly, "let him up."

But Ruggles, released from the hand whose knuckles had ground themselves into his windpipe, could not at once rise. The breath was out of him, for he had been heavily struck in the stomach by a blow from the fist of a man whose training in sport had delightfully returned at need.

Ruggles began to breathe like a porpoise, to grunt and pant and roll over. He staggered to his feet, and with a string of imprecations raised his fist at Waring, but as Bulstrode's revolver was entirely ready to answer at command, he did not venture to leave the spot where he stood.

"Now," said his master, "when you get your tongue your story will be just the same as Mr. Waring's. You found him getting away with the silver. The probabilities are all with you, Ruggles. The police will be here in just about five minutes. Ten to one the guilty man is known to the officers. Now there's an overcoat and hat on the hat-rack in the hall. I give both of you time to get away. There's the front door and the window—which, by the way, you would better shut, Waring, as it's a cold morning."

Neither man moved. Without removing his eyes from the butler or uncovering him, Bulstrode, by means of the messenger-call to the right of the window, summoned the police. The metallic click of the button sounded loud in the room.

Ruggles shook his great hand high in air.

"I'd—I'd——"

"Never mind *that*," interrupted the householder. "The man who's *going* had better take his chance. There's one minute lost."

During the next half-second the modern philanthropist breathed in suspense. It was so on the cards that he might be obliged to apologize to his antipathetic butler and find himself sentimentally sold by Waring!

But Ruggles it was who with a parting oath stepped to the door—accelerating his pace as the daze began to pass a little from his brain, and snatched the hat and coat, unlocked the front door, opened it, looked quickly up and down the white streets, and then without a word cut down the steps and across Washington Square, slowly at first, and then on a run.

Bulstrode turned to his visitor.

"Come," he said, "let's go up to bed."

"But," stammered the young man, "you're never going to let him go like that?"

"Yes, I am," confessed the unpractical gentleman. "I couldn't send a man to jail on Christmas day."

"But the police——?"

"I shall tell them out of my window that it was a false alarm."

Bulstrode shut and locked his door, and turning to Waring, laughed delightedly.

"I must tell you that when he let you in last night Ruggles did not think you were a gentleman. He must have found out this morning that you were very much of a man. It's astonishing where you got your strength, though. He'd make two of you, and you're not fit in any way."

He looked ghastly enough as Bulstrode spoke, and the gentleman put his arm under the Englishman's. "I'll ring for the servants and have some coffee made and fetched to your room. Lean on me." He helped the vagabond upstairs.

The New Yorker, whose sentimental follies were certainly a menace to public safety and a premium to begging and vagabondage and crime, slept well and late, and was awakened finally by the keen, bright ringing of the telephone at his side. As he took up the receiver his whole face illumined.

"Merry Christmas, Jimmy!"

.

"What *wonderful* roses! Thanks a thousand times!"

.

"But of course I knew! No other man in New York is sentimental enough to have a woman awakened at eight o'clock by a bunch of flowers!"

.

"Forgive you!" (It was clear that she did.)

.

"Jimmy, what a day for Tuxedo, and what a shame I can't go!"

.

"You weren't going! You mean to say that you had refused?"

.

"I don't understand—it's the connection—West?"

"Why, ranches look after themselves. They always do. They go right on. You don't *mean* it, on Christmas day!"

.

"I shouldn't care for your reasons. They're sure to be ridiculous—unpractical—unnecessary—don't tell them to me."

There was a pause, and then the voice, which had undergone a slight change said:

"Jack's ill again ... that's why I couldn't go to Tuxedo. I shall pass the day here in town. I called up to tell you this—and to suggest—but since you're going West..."

Falconer's illnesses! How well Bulstrode knew them, and how well he could see her alone in the familiar little drawing-room by a hearth not built for a Christmas tree! He had promised Waring, "I'll stand by you." It was a kind of vow—a real vow, and the poor tramp had lived up to his.

"Jimmy." There was a note he had never heard before; if a tone can be a tear, it was one.

He interrupted her.

.

"How dear of you!"

.

"But I haven't any Christmas tree!"

.

"You'll fetch one? How *dear* of you! We'll trim it—with your roses—make it bloom. Come early and help me dress the tree."

Two hours later he opened the door into his breakfast-room with the guiltiness of a truant boy. He wore culprit shame written all over his face, and the young man who stood waiting for him in the window might almost have read his friend's dejection in his embarrassed face.

But Waring came eagerly forward, answered the season's greetings, and said quickly:

"Are you still in the same mind about the West, Mr. Bulstrode?"

(Poor Bulstrode!)

"I mean to say, sir, if you still feel like giving me this chance, I've a favor to ask. Would you let me go *alone*?"

Bulstrode gasped.

"Since last night a lot has happened to me, not only since you've befriended me, but since I tussled with that fellow here. I'd like a chance to see what I can do alone. If you, as you so generously plan, go with me, I shall feel watched—protected. It will weaken me more than anything else. I suppose I shall go all to pieces, but I'd like to try my strength. If I could suddenly master that chap with my fists after months of dissipation——"

Bulstrode finished for him:

"You can master the rest."

"Don't give me any extra money," pleaded the tramp, as if he foresaw his friend's impulse. "Pay my ticket out West, if you will, and write to the man who is there, and I'll start in."

Bulstrode beamed on him.

"You're a man," he assured him—"a man."

"I may become one."

"You're a fine fellow."

"You'll trust me, then?"

"Implicitly."

"Then let me start to-day. I'm reckless—let me get away. I may get off at the first station and pawn my clothes and drink and drink to a lower hell than before—but let me try alone."

"You shall go alone—and go to-day."

Prosper came in with the coffee; he, too, was beaming, and the servants below-stairs were all agog. Waring was a hero.

"Prosper," said his master, in French, "will you, after you have served breakfast, go out to the market quarters and see if you can discover for me a medium-sized, very well-proportioned little Christmas tree? Fetch it home with you."

Waring smiled faintly.

Bulstrode smiled too, and more comprehendingly, and Prosper smiled and said:

"Mais certainement, monsieur."

THE SECOND ADVENTURE

II

IN WHICH HE TRIES TO BUY A PORTRAIT

Bulstrode was extremely fond of travel, and every now and then treated himself to a season in London or Paris, and in the May following his adventure with Waring he saw, from his apartments in the Hôtel Ritz, from Boulevard, Bois, and the Champs Elysées, as much of the maddeningly delicious Parisian springtime "as was good for him at his age," so he said! It gave the feeling that he was a mere boy, and with buoyant sensations astir in him, life had begun over again.

Any morning between eleven and twelve Bulstrode might have been seen in the Bois de Boulogne briskly walking along the Avenue des Acacias, his well-filled chest thrown out, his step light and assured; cane in hand, a boutonnière tinging the lapel of his coat; immaculate and fresh as a rose, he exhaled good-humor, kindness, and well-being.

From their traps and motors charming women bowed and smiled, the *fine fleur* and the *beau monde* greeted him cordially.

"Regardez moi ce bon Bulstrode qui se promene," if it were a Frenchman, or, "There's dear old Jimmy Bulstrode!" if he were recognized by a compatriot.

Bulstrode was rather slight of build, yet with an evident strength of body that indicated a familiarity with exercise, a healthful habit of sport and activity. His eyes, clear-sighted and strong, looked through the medium of no glass happily and naïvely on the world. Many years before his hair had begun to turn gray, and had not nearly finished the process; it grew thickly, and was quite dark about his ears and on his brow. Having gained experience and kept his youth, he was as rare and delightful as fine wine—as inspiring as spring. It was his heart (Mrs. Falconer said) that made him so, his good, gentle, generous heart!—and she should know. His fastidiousness in point of dress, and his good taste kept him close to elegance of attire.

"You turn yourself out, Jimmy, on every occasion," she had said, "as if you were on the point of meeting the woman you loved." And Bulstrode had replied that such consistent hopefulness should certainly be ultimately rewarded.

He gave the impression of a man who in his youth starts out to take a long and pleasant journey and finds the route easy, the taverns agreeable, and the scenes all the guide-book promised. Midway—he had turned the page of forty)—midway, pausing to look back, Bulstrode saw the experiences of his travels in their sunny valleys, full of goodly memories, and the future, to his sweet hopefulness, promised to be a pleasant journey to the end.

During the time that he spent in Paris every pet charity in the American colony took advantage of the philanthropic Mr. Bulstrode's passing through the city, and came to him to be set upon its feet, and every pretty woman with an interest, hobby, or scheme came as well to this generous millionaire, told him about her fad and went away with a donation.

One ravishing May morning Bulstrode, taking his usual constitutional in the Bois, paused at the end of the Avenue des Acacias to find it deserted and attractively quiet; he sat down on a little bench the more reposefully to enjoy the day and time.

There are, fortunately, certain things which, unlike money, can be shared only with certain people; and Bulstrode felt that the pleasure of this spring day, the charm of the opposite wood-glades into which he meditatively looked, the tranquil as well as the buoyant joy of life, were among those personal things so delightful when shared—and which, if too long enjoyed alone, bring (let it be scarcely whispered on this bewildering May morning) something like sadness!

Before his happier mood changed his attention was attracted by a woman who came rapidly toward the avenue from a little alley at the side. He looked up quickly at the feminine creature who so aptly appeared upon his musings. She was young; her form in its simple dress assured him this. He could not see her face, for it was covered by her hands. Abruptly taking the opposite direction, she went over to a farther seat, where she sat down, and when the young girl put her arms on the back of the seat, her head upon her arms, and in the remoteness this part of the avenue offered, cried without restraint, the kind-hearted Bulstrode felt that it was too cruel to be true.

But soft-hearted though he was, the gentleman was a worldling as well, and that the outburst was a ruse more than suggested itself to him as he went over to the lovely Niobe whose abundant fair hair sunned from under her simple straw hat and from beneath whose frayed skirt showed a worn little shoe.

He spoke in French.

"Pardon, madame, but you seem in great distress."

The poor thing started violently, and as soon as she displayed her pretty tearful face the American recognized in her a compatriot. She waved him emphatically away.

"Oh, please don't notice me—don't speak to me—I didn't see that anybody was there."

"I am an American, too: can't I do anything for you—won't you let me?"

And he saw at once that she wanted to be left alone. She averted her head determinedly.

"No, no, please don't notice me. Please go away!"

He had nothing to do but to obey her, and as he reluctantly did so a smart pony-cart driven by a lady alone came briskly along and drew up, for the occupant had recognized him.

"Get in!" she rather commanded. "My dear Jimmy, how *nice* to find you here, and how nice to drive you at least as far as the entrance!"

As the rebuffed philanthropist accepted he cast a ruthless glance at the solitary figure on the bench.

"Do you see that poor girl over there? She's an American, and in real trouble."

"My *dear* Jimmy!" His companion's tone left him in no doubt as to her scepticism.

"Oh, I know, I know," he interrupted, "but she's not a fraud. She's the real thing."

They were already gayly whirling away from the sad little figure.

"Did you make her cry?"

"I? Certainly not."

"Then let the man who did wipe her tears away!"

But Bulstrode had seen the face of the girl, and he was haunted by it all day until the Bois and its bright atmosphere became only the setting for an unhappy woman, young and lovely, whom it had been impossible for him to help.

Somebody had said that Bulstrode should have his portrait done with his hands in his pockets, and Mrs. Falconer had replied, "Or rather with *other* people's hands in his pockets!"

The next afternoon he found himself part of a group of people who, out of charity and curiosity, patronized the Western Artists' Exhibition in the Rue Monsieur.

Having made a ridiculously generous donation to the support of this league at the request of a certain lovely lady, Bulstrode followed his generosity by a personal effort, and with not much opposition on his part permitted himself to be taken to the exhibition.

He was not, in the ultra sense of the word, a *connaisseur*, but he thought he knew a horror when he saw it! So he said, and on this afternoon his eyes ached and his offended taste cried out before he had patiently travelled half-way down the line of canvases.

"My dear lady," he confided *sotto voce* to his friend, "I feel more inclined to establish a fund for sending all these young women back to the *prairies*, if that's where they come from, than to aid in this slaughter of public time and taste. *Why* don't they stay at home—and marry?"

"That's a vulgar and limited point of view to take," his friend reproached him. "Don't you acknowledge that a woman has many careers instead of one? *You* seem to be thoroughly enjoying your liberty! What if I should ask you why *you* don't stay at home, and marry?"

Bulstrode looked at his guide comprehensively and smiled gently. His response was irrelevant. "Look at this picture! It's too dreadful for words."

"Hush, you're not a judge. Here and there there is evidence of great talent."

They had drawn up before a portrait, and poor Bulstrode caught his breath with a groan:

"It's too awful! It's crime to encourage it."

Mrs. Falconer tried to lead him on.

"Well, this *is* an unfortunate place to stop," she confessed. "That portrait represents more tragedy than you can see."

"It couldn't," murmured Bulstrode.

"The poor girl who did it has struggled on here for two years, living sometimes on a franc a day. Just fancy! She has been trying to get orders so that she can stay on and study. Poor thing! The people who are interested say that she's been near to desperation. She is awfully proud, and won't take any assistance but orders. You can imagine *they're* not besieging her! She has come to her last cent, I believe, and has to go home to Idaho."

"Let her go, my dear friend." Bulstrode was earnest. "It's the best thing she could possibly do!"

His companion put her hand on his arm.

"Please be quiet," she implored. "There she is, standing over by the door. That rather pretty girl with the disorderly blonde hair."

Bulstrode looked up—saw her—looked again, and exclaimed:

"Is *that* the girl? Do you know her? Present me, will you?"

"Nonsense." She detained him. "How you go from hot to cold! *Why* should you want to meet her, pray?"

"Oh," he evaded, "it's a curious study. I want to talk to her about art, and if you don't present me I shall speak to her without an introduction."

Not many moments later Bulstrode was cornered in a dingy little room, where tea that tasted like the infusion of a haystack was being served. He had skilfully disassociated Miss Laura Desprey from her Bohemian companions and placed her on a little divan, before which, with a

teacup in his hand, he stood.

She wore the same dress, the same hat—and he did not doubt the same shoes which characterized her miserable toilet when he had surprised her childlike display of grief on a bench in the Bois. He had done quite right in speaking to her, and he thanked his stars that she did not in the least remember him.

He thought with kind humor: "No wonder she cries if she paints like that!"

But it was not in a spirit of criticism that he bent his friendly eyes on the Bohemian. He had the pleasure of seeing her plainly this time, for the window back of her admitted a generous square of light against which her blonde head framed itself, and her untidy hair was like a dusty mesh of gold. She regarded the amiable gentleman out of eyes child-like and purely blue. Under her round chin the edges of a black bow tied loosely stood out like the wings of a butterfly. Her dress was careless and poor, but she was grace in it and youth—"and what," thought Bulstrode, "has one a right to expect more of any woman?" He remembered her boots and shuddered. He remembered the one franc a day and began his campaign.

"I want so much to meet the painter of that portrait over there," he began.

Her face lightened.

"Oh, did you like it?"

"I think it's wonderful, perfectly wonderful!"

A slow red crept up the thin contour of her cheek. She leaned forward!

"Do you really mean that?"

He said most seriously:

"Yes, I can frankly say I haven't seen a portrait in a long time which impressed me so much."

His praise was not in Latin Quarter vernacular, and coming from a Philistine, had only a certain value to the artist. But to a lonely stranded girl the words were balm. Bulstrode, in his immaculate dress, his conventional manner, was as foreign a person to the Bohemian student as if he had been an inhabitant of another planet. Her speech was brusque and quick, with a generous burr in her "rs" when she replied.

"I've studied at Julian's two years now. This was my Salon picture, but it didn't get in."

"If one can judge by those that *did*"—Bulstrode's tact was delightful—"you should feel honorably refused. I suppose you are at work on another portrait?"

The face which his interest had brightened clouded.

"No, I'm going home—to Idaho—I'm not painting any more."

All the tragedy to a whole-souled Latin Quarter art student that this implied was not revealed to Bulstrode, but, as it was, his sensitive kindness felt so much already that it ached. He hastened toward his goal with eagerness:

"I'm so awfully sorry! Because, do you know, I was going to ask you if you couldn't possibly paint my portrait?" It came from him on the spur of the moment. His frank eyes met hers and might have quailed at his hypocrisy, but the expression of joy on her face, eclipsing everything else, dazzled him.

She cried out impulsively:

"Oh—goodness!" so loud that one or two tea-drinkers turned about. After a second, having gained control and half as though she expected some motive she did not understand:

"But you never *heard* of me before to-day! I don't believe you *really* liked that portrait over there so very much."

With a candor that impressed her he assured her: "I give you my word of honor I've never felt quite so about any portrait before."

Here Miss Desprey had a cup of tea handed her by a vague-eyed girl who stumbled over Bulstrode in her ministrations, much to her confusion.

Laura Desprey drank her tea with avidity, put the cup down on the table near, and leaning over to her patron, exclaimed:

"I just *can't* believe I've got an order!"

Bulstrode affirmed smiling: "You have, and if you could arrange to stay over for it—if it would," he delicately put, "be worth your while——"

She said quietly:

"Yes, it would be worth my while."

A *distract* look passed over her face for a second, and Bulstrode saw he was forgotten in, as he supposed, a painter's vision of an order and its contingent technicalities.

"I can begin at once." He lost no time. "I'm quite free."

"But—I have no studio."

"There must be studios to rent."

Yes. She knew of one; she could secure it for a month. It would take that time—she was a slow worker.

"But we haven't discussed the price." Before so much poverty and struggle—not that it was new to him, but clothed like this in beauty it was rare and appealed to him—he was embarrassed by his riches. "Now the price. I want," he meditated, "a full-length portrait, with a great deal of background, just as handsome and expensive looking as you can paint it."

He exquisitely sacrificed himself and winced at his own words, and saw her color with amusement and a little scorn, but he went on bravely:

"Now for a man like me, Miss Desprey—I am sure you will know what I mean—a man who has never been painted before—this picture will have to cost me a lot of money. You see otherwise my friends would not appreciate it."

In the vulgarian he was making himself out to be his friends would not have recognized the unpretentious Bulstrode.

"Get the place, Miss Desprey, and let me come as soon as you can. All this change of plans will give you extra expenses—I understand about that! Every time I change my rooms it costs me a fortune. Now if you will let me send you over a check for half payment on the picture, for, let us say"—he made it as large as he dared and a quarter of what he wanted. They were alone in the tea-room, the motley gathering had weeded itself out. Miss Desprey turned pale.

"No," she gasped; "I couldn't take anything like half so much for the whole thing."

Bulstrode said coldly:

"I'm afraid I must insist, Miss Desprey; I couldn't order less than a fifteen-hundred dollar portrait. It's the sum I have planned to pay when I'm painted."

"But a celebrated painter would paint it for that."

Bulstrode smiled fatuously.

"Can't a man pay for his fads? I want to be painted by the person who did that portrait over there, Miss Desprey."

In a tiny studio—the dingy chrysalis of a Bohemian art student—Bulstrode posed for his portrait.

Each morning saw him set forth from the Ritz alert and debonaire in his fastidious toilet—saw him cross the Place Vendôme, the bridge, and lose his worldly figure in the lax nonchalant crowd of the Quarter Latin. At the end of an alley as narrow and picturesque as a lane in a colored print he knocked at a green door, and was admitted to the studio by his protégée. In another second he had assumed his prescribed position according to the pose, and Miss Desprey before her easel began the *séance*.

On these May days the glass roof admitted delightful gradations of glory to the commonplace *atelier*. A few cheap casts, a few yards of mustard-toned burlaps, some Botticelli and Manet photographs, a mangy divan, and a couple of chairs were the furnishings. It had been impossible for Bulstrode to pass indifferently the venders of flowers in the festive, brilliant streets, and great bunches of *giroflé*, hyacinths, and narcissi overflowed the earthenware pitchers and vases with which the studio was plentifully supplied. The soft, sharp fragrance rose above the shut-in odor of the *atelier*; and, while Miss Desprey worked, her patron looked at her across waves of spring perfume.

Her painting-dress, a garment of *beige* linen, half belted in at the waist and entirely covering her, made her to Bulstrode, from the crown of her fair hair to the tip of her old tan shoes, seem all of one color. He had taken tremendous interest in his pose, in the progress of the work. He would have looked at the portrait every few moments, but Miss Desprey refused him even a glimpse. He was to wait until all manner of strange things took place on the canvas, till "schemes and composition" were determined, "proper values" arrived at, and he listened to her glib school

terms with respect and a sanguine hope that with the aid of such potent technicalities and his interest she might be able to achieve this time something short of atrocious.

He posed faithfully for Miss Desprey, and smiled at her with friendly eyes whenever he caught anything more personal than the squinting glance with which she professionally regarded him, putting him far away or fetching him near, according to her art's requirements. They talked in his rest, and he took pleasure in telling her how he enjoyed his morning walks from his hôtel, how the outdoor life delighted him, and how all the suburban gardens seemed to have been brought to Paris to glow and blossom in the venders' carts or in little baskets on the backs of women and boys, and how thoroughly well worth living he thought life in Paris was.

"There is," he finished, "nothing in the world which compares to the Paris spring-time, I believe, but I have never been West. What is spring like in Idaho?"

Miss Desprey laughed, touched her ruffled hair with painty fingers, blushed, and mused.

"Oh, it's all right, I guess. There's a trolley-line in Centreville, an electric plant and the oil works—no trees, no flowers, and the people all look alike. So you see"—she had a dazzling way of shaking her head, when her fine white teeth, her sunny dishevelled hair, her bright cheeks and eyes seemed all to flash and chime together—"so you see, spring in Centreville and *Paris* isn't the same thing at all! Things are beautiful everywhere," she assured him slowly as she painted, "if you're happy—and I was very unhappy in Centreville, so I thought I'd come away and try to have a career." She poured out a long stream of *garance* from the tube on to her palette. Bulstrode watched, fascinated.

"And here in Paris, are you—have you been happy here?"

"Oh, dear no!" she laughed; "perfectly miserable. And it used to seem as though it was cruel of the city to be so gay and happy when I couldn't join in—" Bulstrode, remembering the one franc a day and the very questionable inspiration her poor art could impart, understood; his face was full of feeling—"until," she went slowly on, "lately." She stepped behind the canvas and was lost to sight. "I've been awfully happy in Paris for the first time. I do like beautiful things—but I like beautiful people better—and you're beautiful—beautiful."

She finished with a blush and a smile.

Bulstrode grew to think nothing at all about his portrait further than fervently to hope it would not shock him beyond power to disguise. But Miss Desprey was frightfully in earnest, and worked until her eyes glowed with excitement and her cheeks burned. Strong and vigorous and (Bulstrode over and over again said) "young, so young!" she never evinced any signs of fatigue, but stood when his limbs trembled under him and looked up radiant when he was ready to cry "*Grâce!*" In her enthusiasm she would have given him two sittings a day, but this his worldly relations would not permit. As she painted, painted, her head on one side sometimes, sometimes thrown back, her eyes half closed, he studied her with pleasure and delight.

"What a pity she paints so dreadfully ill! What a pity she paints at all! What difference, after all, does it make *what* she does? She's so pretty and feminine!" She was a clinging, sweet creature, and the walk and the flower debauch he permitted himself, the long quiet hours of companionship with this lovely girl in the *atelier*, illumined, accentuated, and intensified Bulstrode's already fatuous appreciation of the spring in Paris.

During Bulstrode's artistic mornings there distilled itself into the studio a magic to which he was not insensitive. Whether or not it came with the flowers or with the delicate filtering of the sun through the studio light, who can say, but as he stood in his assumed position of *nonchalance* he was more and more charmed by his painter. The spell he naturally felt should, and for long indeed did, emanate from the slender figure, lost at times behind her canvas, and at times completely in his view.

For years Bulstrode had been the victim of hope, or rather in this case of intent, *to love again*—to love anew! Neither of these statements is the correct way of putting it. He tried with good faith to prove himself to be what was so generally claimed for him by his friends—susceptible; alas, he knew better!

As he meditatively studied the blonde young girl he spun for himself to its end the idea of picking her up, carrying her off, marrying her, shutting Idaho away definitely, and opening to her all that his wealth and position could of life and the world. He grew tender at the thought of her poor struggle, her insufficient art, her ambition. It fascinated him to think of playing the good fairy, of touching her gray, hard life to color and beauty, and as the beauty and the holy intimacy of home occurred to him, and marriage, his thoughts wandered as pilgrims whose feet stray back in the worn ways and find their own old footprints there, ... and after a few moments Miss Desprey was like to be farther away from his meditations than Centreville is from Paris, and the personality of the dream-woman was another. Once Miss Desprey's voice startled him out of such a reverie by bidding him, "*Please* take the pose, Mr. Bulstrode!" As he laughed and apologized he caught her eyes fixed on him with, as he thought, a curious expression of affection and sympathy—indeed, tears sprang to them. She reddened and went furiously back to work. She was more personal that day than she had yet been. She seemed, after having surprised his absent-

mindedness, to feel that she had a right to him—quite ordered him about, and was almost petulant in her exactions of his positions.

Her work evidently advanced to her satisfaction.

As she stood elated before her easel, her hair in sunny disorder, her eyes like stars, Bulstrode was conscious there was a change in her—she was excited and tremulous. In her frayed dress, sagging at the edges, her paint-smearred apron, her slender thumb through the hole in the palette, she came over to him at the close of the sitting, started to speak, faltered, and said:

"You don't know what it means to me—all you have done. And I can't ever tell you."

"Oh, don't," he pleaded, "pray don't speak of it!"

Miss Desprey, half radiant and half troubled, turned away as if she were afraid of his eyes.

"No, I won't try to tell you. I couldn't, I don't dare," she whispered, and impulsively caught his hand and kissed it.

When he had left the studio finally it was with a bewildering sense of having kissed her hand—no, both of her hands! but one held her palette and he *couldn't* have kissed that one without having got paint on his nose—perhaps he had! He was not at peace.

That same night a telegram brought him news to the effect that Miss Desprey was ill and would not expect him to pose the following day; and relieved that it was not required of him to resume immediately the over-charged relations, he went back to his old habit, rudely broken into by his artistic escapade, and walked far into the Bois.

He thought with alarming persistency of Miss Desprey. He was chivalrous with women, old-fashioned and clean-minded and straight-lived. In the greatest, in the only passion of his life, he had been a Chevalier Bayard, and he could look back upon no incidents in which he had played the part which men of the world pride themselves on playing well. Women were mysterious and wonderful to him. Because of one he approached them all with a feeling not far from worship; and he had no intention of doing a dishonorable thing. Puzzled, self-accusing—although he did not quite know of what he was guilty—he sat down as he had done several weeks before on the bench in the Avenue des Acacias. With extraordinary promptness, as if arranged by a scene-setter, a girl's figure came quickly out of a side alley. She was young—her figure betrayed it. She went quickly over to a seat and sat down. She was weeping and covered her face with her hands. Bulstrode, this time without hesitation, went directly over to her:

"My dear Miss Desprey——"

She sprang up and displayed a face disfigured with weeping.

"*You!*" she exclaimed with something like terror. "Oh, Mr. Bulstrode!"

Her words shuddered in sobs.

"Don't stay here! Why did you come? Please go—please."

Bulstrode sat down beside her and took her hands.

"I'm not going away—not until I know what your trouble is. You were in distress when I first saw you here and you wouldn't let me help you then. Now you can't refuse me. What is it?"

He found she was clinging to his hands as she found voice enough to say:

"No, I can't tell you. I couldn't ever tell you. It's not the same trouble, it's a new one and worse. I guess it's the worst thing in the world."

Bulstrode was pitiless:

"One that has come lately to you?"

"Oh, yes!"

She was weeping more quietly now.

"Please leave me: please go, Mr. Bulstrode."

"A trouble with which I have had anything to do?"

She waited a long time, then faintly breathed:

"Yes."

The hand he firmly held was gloveless and cold—before he could say anything further she

drew it away from him and cried:

"Oh, I ought never to have let you guess! You were so good and kind, you meant to help me so, but it's been the worst help of all, only you couldn't know that," she pleaded for him. "Please forgive me if I seem ungrateful, but if I had known that I was going to suffer like this I would have wished never to see you in the world."

Bulstrode was trying to speak, but she wouldn't let him:

"I never can see you again. Never! You mustn't come any more."

But here she half caught her breath and sobbed with what seemed naïve and adorable daring:

"Unless you can help me through, Mr. Bulstrode—it is your fault, after all."

If this were a virtual throwing of herself into his arms, they were all but open to her and the generous heart was all but ready "to see her through." Bulstrode was about to do, and say, the one rash and irrevocable perfect thing when at this minute fate again at the ring of the curtain opportuned. The tap, tapping, of a pony's feet was heard and a gay little cart came brightly along. Bulstrode saw it. He sprang to his feet. It was close upon them.

"You will let me come to-morrow?" he asked eagerly,

"Oh, yes," she whispered; "yes, I shall count on you. I beg you will come."

"Jimmy," said the lady severely as he accepted her invitation to get into the cart, "this is the second wicked rendezvous I have interrupted. I didn't know you were anything like this, and I've seen that girl before, but I can't remember where."

"Don't try," said Bulstrode.

"And she was crying. Of course you made her cry."

"Well," said Bulstrode desperately, "if I did, it's the first woman that has ever cried for me."

As the reason why Bulstrode had never married was again in Paris, he went up in the late afternoon to see her.

The train of visitors who showed their appreciation of her by thronging her doors had been turned away, but Bulstrode was admitted. The man told him, "Mrs. Falconer will see you, sir," by which he had the agreeably flattered feeling that she would see nobody else.

When he was opposite her the room at once dwindled, contracted, as invariably did every place in which they found themselves together, into one small circle containing himself and one woman. Mrs. Falconer said at once to Bulstrode:

"Jimmy, you're in trouble—in one of your quandaries. What useless good have you been doing, and who has been sharper than a serpent's tooth to you?"

Bulstrode's late companionship with youth had imparted to him a boyish look. His friend narrowly observed him, and her charming face clouded with one of those almost imperceptible *nuances* that the faces of those women wear who feel everything and by habit reveal nothing.

"I'm not a victim." Bulstrode's tone was regretful. "One might say, on the contrary, this time that I was possibly overpaid."

"Yes?"

"I haven't," he explained and regretted, "seen you for a long time."

"I've been automobiling in Touraine." Mrs. Falconer gave him no opportunity to be delinquent.

"And I," he confessed, "have been posing for my portrait. Don't," he pleaded, "laugh at me—it isn't for a miniature or a locket; it's life-size, horribly life-size. I've had to stand, off and on with the rests, three hours a day, and I've done so *every day for three weeks.*"

Mrs. Falconer regarded him with indulgent amusement.

"It's your fault—you took me to see those awful school-girl paintings and pointed out that poor young creature to me." And he was interrupted by her exclamation:

"Oh, how *dear* of you, Jimmy! how sweet and kind and ridiculous! It won't be fit to be seen."

"Oh, never mind that," he waved; "no one need see it. I haven't—she won't let me."

He had accepted a cup of tea from the lady's hand; he drank it off and sat down, holding the empty cup as if he held his fate.

"Tell me," she urged, "all about it. It was just like you—any other man would have found means to show charity, but you have shown unselfish goodness, and that's the rarest thing in the world. Fancy posing every day! How ghastly and how wonderful of you!"

"No," he said slowly, "it wasn't any of these things. I wanted to do it. It amused me at first, you see. But now I am a little annoyed—rather bothered to tell the truth—He met her eyes with almost an appeal in his. Mrs. Falconer was in kindness bound to help him.

"Bothered? How, pray? With what part of it? You're not chivalrous about it, are you? You're not by the way of feeling that you have compromised her by posing?"

"Oh, no, no," he hurried; "but I do feel, and I am frank to acknowledge, that it was a mistake. Because—do you know—that for some absurd reason I am afraid she has become fond of me." He blushed like a boy. Mrs. Falconer said coldly:

"Yes? Well, what of it?"

"This—" Bulstrode's voice was quiet and determined—"if I am right I shall marry her."

Mrs. Falconer had the advantage over most women of completely understanding the man with whom she dealt. She knew that to attempt to turn from its just and generous source any intent of Mr. Bulstrode would have been as futile as to attempt to turn a river from its parent fountain.

"You're quixotic, I know, but you're not demented, and you won't certainly marry this nobody—whose fancies or love-affairs have not the least importance. You won't ever see her again unless you are in love with her yourself."

Bulstrode interrupted her hastily:

"Oh, yes, I shall."

He got up and walked over to the window that looked down on Mrs. Falconer's trim little garden. A couple of iron chairs and a table stood under the trees. Early roses had begun to bloom in the beds whose outlines were thick and dark with heart's-ease. Beyond the iron rail of the high wall the distant rumble of Paris came to his ears. Mrs. Falconer's voice behind him said:

"She's a very pretty girl, and young enough to be your daughter."

"No," he said quietly, "not by many years."

As he turned about and came back to the lady the room seemed to have grown darker and she to sit in the shadow. She leaned toward him, laughing:

"So you have come to announce at last the famous marriage of yours we have so often planned together."

Bulstrode stood looking down on her.

"I feel myself responsible," he said gravely. "She was going home, and by a mistaken impulse I came in and changed her plans. She is perfectly alone and perfectly poor, and I am not going to add to her perplexities. I have no one in the world to care what I do. I have no ties and no duties."

"No," said Mrs. Falconer; "you are wonderfully free."

He said vehemently:

"I am all of a sudden wonderfully miserable."

He had been in the habit for years of suddenly leaving her without any warning, and now he put out his hand and bade her good-by, and before she could detain him had made one of many brusque exits from her presence.

On the following day—a Sunday, as from his delightful apartments in the Ritz he set forth for the studio, Bulstrode bade good-by to his bachelor existence. He knew when he should next see the Place Vendôme it would be with the eyes of an engaged man. His life hereafter was to be shared by a "total stranger." So he pathetically put it, and his sentimental yearning to share everything with a lovely woman had died a sudden death.

"There's no one in the world to care a rap what I do—really," he reflected, "and in this case I have run up against it—that's the long and the short of the matter—and I shall see it through."

As he set out for Miss Desprey's along his favorite track he remarked that the gala, festive character of Paris had entirely disappeared. The season had gone back on him by several months, and the melancholy of autumn and dreary winter cast a gloom over his boyish spirits. A very slight rain was falling. Bulstrode began to feel a twinge of rheumatism in his arm and as he irritably opened his umbrella his spirits dropped beneath it and his brisk, springy walk sagged to something resembling the gait of a middle-aged gentleman. But he urged himself into a better mood, however, at the sight of a flower-shop whose delicate wares huddled appealingly close to the window. He went in and purchased an enormous bunch of—he hesitated—there were certain flowers he *could* not, would *not* send! The selection his sentimental reserve imposed therefore consisted of sweet-peas, *giroflés*, and a big cluster of white roses, all very girlish and virginal. His bridal offering in his hand, he took a cab and drove to the other side of the river with lead at his good heart and, he almost fancied, a lump in his throat. He paid the coachman, whose careless spirits he envied, and slowly walked down the picturesque alley of Impasse du Maine.

"There isn't a man I know—not a man in the Somerset Club—who would be as big a fool as this!"

He had more than a mind to leave the flowers on the doorstep and run. Bulstrode would have done so now that he was face to face with his quixotic folly, but his cab had been heard as well as his steps on the walk, and the door was opened by Miss Desprey herself. The girl's colorless face, her eyes spoiled with tears, and a pretty, sad dignity, which became her well, struck her friend with the sincerity and depth of her grief, and as the good gentleman shook hands with her he realized that less than ever in the world could he add a featherweight of grief to the burden of this helpless creature.

"My dearest child!" He lifted her hand to his lips.

"Oh, Mr. Bulstrode, I'm so glad you've come, I was so afraid you wouldn't—after yesterday!"

His arms were still full of white paper, roses, and sweet-peas.

"Oh, don't give them to me, Mr. Bulstrode! Oh, why, did you bring them? Oh, dear, what will you think of me?" She had possessed herself of the flowers and with agitation and distress hastily thrust them, as if she wanted to hide them, behind the draperies of the couch. Bulstrode murmured something of whose import he was scarcely conscious. As she came tearfully back to him she let him take her hands. He felt that she clung to him. "It would have spoiled my life if you hadn't come. I would have just gone and jumped in the Seine. I may yet. Oh, you don't understand! It's been hard to be poor—I've been often hungry—but this last thing was too much. When you found me yesterday I didn't want to live any more."

Bulstrode's kind clasp warmed the cold little hands. As tenderly as he could he looked at her agitated prettiness.

"Don't talk like that"—he tried for her first name and found it. "Laura, you will let me make it all right, my dear? You will let me, won't you? You shall never know another care if I can prevent it."

She interrupted with hasty gratitude:

"Nobody else can make it all right but you."

He tried softly:

"Did I, then, make it so very wrong?"

She murmured, too overcome to trust herself to say much:

"Yes!"

She was standing close to him, and lifted her appealing face to his. Her excitement communicated itself to him; he bent toward her about to kiss her, when the door of the studio sharply opened, and before Bulstrode could do more than swiftly draw back and leave Miss Desprey free an exceedingly tall and able-bodied man entered without ceremony.

The girl gave a cry, ran from Bulstrode, and, so to speak, threw herself against the arms of the stranger, for there were none open to receive her.

"Oh, here's Mr. Bulstrode, Dan! I knew he'd come; and he'll tell you—won't you, Mr. Bulstrode? Tell him, please, that I don't care anything at all about you and you don't care anything about me.... That you don't want to marry me or anything. Oh, please make him believe it!"

The poor gentleman's senses and brain whirling together made him giddy. He felt as though he had just been whisked up from the edge of a precipice over which he ridiculously dangled. Dan, who represented the rescuer, was not prepossessing. He was the complete and unspoiled type of Western youth; the girl herself was an imperfect and exquisite hybrid.

"I don't know that this gentleman can explain to me"—the young fellow threw his boyish head

back—"or that I care to hear him."

She gave a cry, sharp and wounded. The sound touched the now normal, thoroughly grateful patron, who had come out of his ordeal with as much kindly sensibility as he went in.

"Of course, my dear young lady"—he perfectly understood the situation—"I will tell your friend the facts of our acquaintance. That's what you want me to do, isn't it?"

She was weeping and hanging on to the unyielding arm of her cross lover, who glared at the intruding Bulstrode with a youthful jealousy at which the older man smiled while he envied it. He pursued impressively:

"Miss Desprey has been painting my portrait for the past few weeks. I gave her the order at the Art League; other than painter and sitter we have no possible interest in each other—Mr.—"

"Gregs," snapped the stranger, "Daniel Gregs!"

The slender creature, whose eyes never left the stolid, uncompromising face, repeated eagerly:

"*No possible interest*—Dan—none! He doesn't care anything about me at all! You heard what he said, didn't you? I only like him like a kind, kind friend."



"I only like him like a kind, kind friend"

Her voice, soft as a flower, caressed and pleaded with the passionate tenderness of a woman who feels that an inadvertent word may keep for her or lose for her the man she adores.

"My dear man," exclaimed Bulstrode in great irritation, "you ought to be ashamed to let her cry like that! Can't you *understand*—don't you see?"

"No," shortly caught up the other, "I don't! I've come here from South Africa, where I'm prospecting some mines for a company at Centreville, and I heard she was poor and unhappy, and I hurried up my things so I could come to Paris and marry her and take her with me, and here I find her painting every day alone with a rich man, her place all fixed up with flowers, and a thousand dollars in the bank"—his cheek reddened—"I don't like it! And that's all there is to it!" he finished shortly.

"No, my friend," said the other severely, "there's a great deal more. If, from what you say, and the way you speak, you wish me to understand you have a real interest in Miss Desprey, you can follow me when I say that I came here and found her a lonely, forsaken girl, obliged to return to Idaho when she didn't want to go, without any money or any friends. May I ask you why, if there was any one in the world who cared for her, she should be left so deserted?"

The girl here turned her face from her lover to her champion.

"Don't please blame Dan for that. He was so poor, too. He didn't have anything when he went to South Africa; it was just a chance if he would succeed. And he was working for me, so that he could get married."

Gregs interrupted:

"I don't owe this gentleman any explanation!"

"No," accepted the other gently, "perhaps not, but you mustn't, on the other hand, refuse to hear mine. Be reasonable. Why *shouldn't* Miss Desprey have an order for a portrait?"

Gregs, over the golden head against his arm, looked at Bulstrode:

"*She* can't paint!" His tone was gentler. "Laura can't paint, and you know it!"

"Dan!" she whispered; "how cruel you are to me!"

And here the desperate Bulstrode broke in:

"He is, indeed, Miss Desprey, cruel and unjust, and I frankly ask leave to tell him so. You don't deserve the girl, Mr. Gregs, if she's yours, as she seems to be."

But the girl clung closer, as if she still feared Bulstrode might try to rescue her.

"That's all right," frowned the miner. "I am no better and no worse than any man about his girl, and I'm going to know *just where I stand!*"

The gentleman's reply was caustic. "I should be inclined to say you'd find it hard to be in a better place."

Laura Desprey had wound her arms around Mr. Gregs. Bulstrode held out his hand. She couldn't take it, nor could her lover. With arrogant obstinacy he had folded his arms across his chest.

"Come, can't we be friends?" urged the amiable gentleman. "I seem to have made trouble when I only wanted to be friendly. Let me set it right before I go. I am lunching in Versailles, and I have to take the noon train from the Gare Montparnasse."

But Daniel Gregs did not unbend to the affable proposition. Miss Desprey said:

"When you saw me yesterday in the park, Mr. Bulstrode, Dan had just come back the day before. I was putting the flowers you sent me in fresh water when he came in on me all of a sudden. Oh, it was so splendid at first! I was *so* happy—until he asked all about you, and then he grew so angry and said unless you could explain to him a lot of things he would go away and never see me again, and when you found me I was crying because I thought he had left me forever. I hadn't seen him for two years, and if you hadn't helped me to stay on here I should have had to go to Idaho, and I wouldn't have seen him at all. You ought to *thank* him, Dan."

Bulstrode interrupted:

"Indeed, Mr. Gregs, you should, you know!—you should thank me; come, be generous."

Dan relaxed his grim humor a little.

"When I get through with this South African business I'm going back to Centreville, and if I ever get her out of this Paris *she'll* never see it again!"

"Dan," she breathed, "I don't want to. Centreville is good enough for me."

(Centreville! The horrible environment he was to have snatched her from. Bulstrode smiled softly.)

"But this money," pursued the dogged lover, returning to his grudge. "You've got to take it back, Mr. Bulstrode. No picture on earth is worth a thousand dollars, and certainly not Laura's."

"Oh, Dan!" she exclaimed.

But her friend said firmly: "The portrait is mine. Come, don't be foolish. If Miss Desprey is willing to marry you and go out to Idaho, take the money and buy her some pretty clothes and things."

Here the girl herself interrupted excitedly:

"No, no! We couldn't take it. I don't want any new clothes. If Dan doesn't care how shabby I am, I don't. I don't want anything in the world but just to go with Dan."

At this sweet tenderness Dan's face entirely changed, his arms unfolded; he put them around her.

"That's all right, little girl." His tone thrilled through Bulstrode more than the woman's tears had done. He understood why she wanted to go to him, and how she could be drawn. He had at times in his life lost money, and sometimes heavily, and he had never felt poor before. In the same words, but in a vastly different tone, Dan Gregs held out his hand to Bulstrode.

"That's all right, sir. When a fellow travels thousands and thousands of miles to get his girl and hasn't much more than his car fare and he runs up against another fellow who has got the rocks and all and who he thinks is sweet on his girl, it makes him crazy—just crazy!"

"I see"—Bulstrode sympathetically understood—"and I don't at all wonder."

They were all three shaking hands together and Bulstrode said:

"Would you believe it, I haven't seen my portrait, Miss Desprey."

Dan Gregs grinned.

"Don't," he said, "don't look at it. It's what made all the trouble. When I saw it yesterday and Laura told me it had drawn a thousand dollars—why I said 'there isn't a man living who would give you fifty cents for it.' That made her mad at first. Then she told me you thought she was a great portrait-painter, and I knew you must be sweet on her. I'm fond of her all right, but I decided that you were bound to have her and didn't care how you dealt your cards, and I thought I'd clear out."

His face fell and threatened to cloud over, but it cleared again as with the remembrance of his doubts came the actual sense of the woman whose face was hidden on his breast, and he lightly touched the dusty golden hair.

When in a few seconds Bulstrode took leave of them, Miss Desprey, in her dingy painting-dress, seemed completely swallowed up in the embrace of the big Dan Gregs. From where he stood by the door Bulstrode could see the white corner of his *fiançailles* bouquet sticking out from the draperies of the couch. The paper was open and in the heat of the warm little *atelier* the fresh odor of the pungent flowers came strongly on the air.

Bulstrode as he said good-by seemed to say it—and to look at the lovers—through a haze of perfume—a perfume that, like the most precious things in the world, pervades and affects, suggests and impresses, while its existence is unseen, unknown to the world.

Once in his train, he had been able to catch it at the Invalides after all, Jimmy drew a long breath and settled back into himself, for, he had been, poor dear, during the past three weeks, in another man's shoes and profiting by another man's identity. It was perfectly heavenly to feel that he had been liberated by the merciful providence which takes care to provide the right lover for the right place. He couldn't be too grateful for the miracle which saved him from a sacrifice alongside of which Abraham's would have been a jest indeed.

The June morning was warm and through the open car window, as the train went comfortably along, the perfume of the country came into him where he sat. Opposite, a pair of lovers frankly and naturally showed their annoyance at the third person's intrusion, and Bulstrode, sympathetically turned himself about and became absorbed in Suburban Paris. His heart beat high at the fact of his deliverance. His gratitude was sincere—moreover, his thoughts were of an agreeable trend, and he was able to forget everybody else within twelve miles. Secure in his impersonality and in the indifference of his broad unseeing back, the lovers kissed and held hands.

Bulstrode wandered slowly up from the Versailles station to the Hôtel des Reservoirs, crossed the broad square of the Palace Court, found the pink and yellow façade more mellow and perfect than ever, and toward twelve-thirty strolled into the yard of the old hostel. Breakfast had been set for twelve-thirty, but his host was not there.

"Ah—mais, bon jour, Monsieur Bulstrode!" The proprietor knew and appreciated this client greatly.

Monsieur Falconer, it seemed, had been called suddenly to Paris.... Yes—well—there were, now and then, in the course of life, bits of news that could be borne with fortitude. "And Madame has also been called to Paris?"

"Mais non!" Madame had a few minutes since gone out in the Park, the proprietor thought she would not be very far away.

Bulstrode thanked him, and crossed over to the hedge and the gateway and through it to the Palace Gardens. On all sides the paths stretched broad and inviting toward the various alleys, and upon the terrace to his left there shone a thousand flowers in June abundance. The gentleman chose the first path that opened, and went carelessly down it, and in a few moments the pretty ring of an embowered circle spread before him, but, although there was an inviting marble bench under a big tree at one side, and several eighteenth century marbles on their pedestals, illuminated by the bland eighteenth century smile, there was not a living woman in sight to make him, the visitor, welcome! He went a little further along and found another felicitous, harmonious circle, where a small fountain threw its jets on the June air. At the sound of the water Bulstrode remembered that the Grands Eaux were to play on this afternoon at Versailles.

"Ah, *that* is why they especially wanted me to come out to-day," he decided.

On the other side of the fountain, the vivid white of her summer dress making a flash like moonlight on the obscurity of the woods, a lady was standing looking across at Mr. Bulstrode.

"Hush!" she said; "come over softly, Jimmy; there is a timid third party here."

On a branch at her side, where an oriole sat, his head thrown back, his throat swelling, there was a little stir and flutter of leaves, for although the lady had put her finger to her lips, her voice broke the spell, and a bit of yellow flashed through the trees.

"I don't believe *he* will ever forgive you!" she cried; "you spoiled his solo, but I'll forgive you. What brought you out to Versailles to-day?"

"The fountains," Bulstrode told her; "I have never seen them play. Then, too—there are certain places to which, when I am asked to luncheon, I always go."

"That's quite true," she accepted; "you *were* invited!—but, to be perfectly frank, I did not expect you, so your coming on this occasion has only the pleasure of a surprise. As a rule, I hate them. My husband informed me that he would telephone you to meet him in Paris, but I think he must have forgotten you, Jimmy."

She was taking him in from his fresh panama to his boots, and she apparently found an air of festivity about him.

"Was it," she asked, "in honor of the fountains' playing that you have made yourself so beautiful?"

Bulstrode took the boutonnière out of his coat lapel and handed it to her. "Can't you pin it in somewhere?" Mrs. Falconer laughed and thrust the carnation into her bodice.

"I dressed to-day, more or less," Mr. Bulstrode confessed, "in order to attend—well, what shall I call it—a betrothal? That's a good old-fashioned word."

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady, "a *fiançailles*?"

"Yes."

The two had wandered slowly along, out of the Bosquet towards the canals.

"They make a great deal of these functions in France," Mrs. Falconer said.

Her companion agreed. "They made a great deal, rather more than usual, out of this one." And his tone was so suggestive that his companion looked up at him quickly.

"Who *are* your mysterious lovers?" she asked, "are they French? Do I know them?"

"They are not in the least mysterious," Bulstrode assured her. "I never saw anything less complex and more simple. They are Americans."

She seemed now to understand that she was to hear of "one of Jimmy's adventures," as she called his dashes in other people's affairs.

"I hope, Jimmy, in this case, that you have pulled the affair off to your credit, and that if you have made a match the creatures will be grateful to you for once! And, by the way," she bethought; "whatever has happened to the pretty girl whom you were quixotic enough to think you had to marry?"

"The last time I saw her she appeared to be in the best of circumstances," Bulstrode answered cheerfully. "In point of fact—it was, singularly enough, to *her* engagement party that I went to-day!"

And Mrs. Falconer now showed real interest and feeling. "No! how delightful. So she is really off your hands, Jimmy. Well, that is too good to be true. There's one at least whom you don't have to marry, Jimmy!"

"Oh, they grow beautifully less," he agreed.

Mrs. Falconer smiled softly.

"They are narrowing down every year," Jimmy went on; "when I am about sixty the number will be reduced, I dare say, to the proper quantity."

"What a goose you are," she said jestingly. "What a tease and a bother you are, Jimmy Bulstrode; *I'll* find you a proper wife!"

He accepted warmly. "Do, do! I leave myself quite in your hands."

His companion extended him her hand as she spoke, and after lifting it to his lips, Bulstrode drew it through his arm. It was clothed in a glove of pale coffee-color suede. It was a soft, dear hand, and rested as if it were at home on Bulstrode's gray sleeve. Side by side the two friends walked slowly out toward the broader avenues leading to the canals. The sky was faintly blue, touched with the edges of some drifting cloud, like dashes of foam. The trees about them lifted dark velvet masses and the air was sweet with the scent of the woods and flowers.

"Isn't this the most beautiful garden in the world?" murmured Mrs. Falconer. "Isn't it *too* beautiful!"

"Very," he incorrectly and vaguely answered. And the lady went on to say how brilliant she found the place with the suggestions and memories of the past royal times, whilst Bulstrode said nothing at all, because he did not want to tell her that Versailles and the charming alleys, and France, and the great big world, from limit to limit, was full of no ghosts to him, but of just one woman.

THE THIRD ADVENTURE

III

IN WHICH HE FINDS THERE ARE SOME THINGS WHICH ONE CANNOT BUY

After not a great deal of hesitation, toward the middle of a warm June, Bulstrode permitted himself to become the proprietor of a palace: not an inhabitant of the ordinary dwelling modelled after some old-world wonder, wherein American millionaires choose to spend their leisure in their own country—but of a real traditional palace, in whose charming rooms no object was younger than Bulstrode's great-grandfather, and where the enchanting women of the Fragonards and Nattiers almost made him, as he mused upon them, lose sight for a moment of a living lady.

On the very first day he went over the Hôtel Montensier from *grenier* to *caves*, Jimmy Bulstrode gave in, and accepted the Duc de Montensier's proposition to "fetch his traps for a few months to the hôtel and turn Parisian." He was in the heart of Paris, yet all around him, shut in by high walls, was a garden, to which the terraces of the house gave in flights of marble steps. When his friend suggested that Bulstrode turn Parisian, Jimmy laughed. "Do you think," he had asked, "that a chap born in Providence, educated in Harvard, and, if cosmopolitan, thoroughly American from start to finish, could, *mon cher*, turn Parisian?" And the Duc had assured him that he did not think Bulstrode had a "Latin eyelash," and that he needn't be at all afraid to try his luck at what a French house would do for him! "Why, your coat alone—the cut of it—" Montensier had laughed, "speaks of Poole with a Boston compromise!"

The Duc had been in the United States—moreover, the Frenchman had plans of his own and he wanted very much to go to Newport and leave his house in the care of Jimmy Bulstrode. Whether the Puritan in him led Bulstrode to excuse to himself his enjoyment of so much luxury, at any rate he apologized, saying that nobody could expect a man with a love of the beautiful, and who had more or less a desire to shut himself up and to shut himself away for a time, to refuse.

The Falconers were off somewhere *en auto*. He had thought they had gone through Spain. It was pretty hot to do such a thing, however, and he did not really know. He wanted very much to be able not to let himself follow them, and he knew that there was little chance of his reaching such stoicism unless he began by not finding out where they were going! So he shut himself up with the books which the library offered and gave many charming little dinners and parties on his terraces in the bland summer nights, and tried with all his might and main to forget the flight of a certain motor over the fair white roads and, above all, to nerve himself up to refuse an invitation

for the middle of July.

Directly opposite the white façade of the Montensiers' hôtel was a hostelry for beggars, for domestics without places; for poor professors; for actors with no stages but the last; for laborers with no labor; in short, for the riff-raff of the population, for those who no longer hold the dignity of profession or pay rent for a term. Sometimes Bulstrode would look out at the tenement, whose windows in this season were wide open; and the general aspect indicated that dislocated fortunes flourished. In one window, pirouetting or dancing in it, calling out of it, leaning perilously over the sill of it, was a child—as far as Bulstrode could decide, a creature of about six years of age. She was too small to see much of, but all he saw was activity, gesticulation, and perpetual motion. When the day was hot she fanned herself with a bit of paper. She called far out to the wine-merchant's wife, who sat with her family before the shop while her pretty children played in the gutter.

In Paris, when the weather climbs to eighty, Parisians count themselves in the tropics and the people, who lived apparently out of doors altogether, wore a melted, disheartened air. But the De Montensier garden, full of roses and heliotrope, watered and refreshed by the fountains' delightful falling, was a retreat not to be surpassed by many suburbs. Bulstrode gave little dinners on the terrace; little suppers after the theatre, when rooms and garden were lighted with fairy lanterns, and his chef outdid his traditions to please his American master.

One day as the American sat smoking on the terrace with nothing more disturbing than the drip of the fountain and the remote murmur of Paris to break his reverie, Prosper, his confidential man, made a tentative appearance.

"Would m'sieu, *who is so good*, see a young lady?"

His master smiled as he rose, instinctively at the words "jeune demoiselle," throwing away his cigar.

"Pardon, m'sieu, I thought it might amuse m'sieu—" and Prosper stepped back.

Bulstrode had been intently thinking of the caravansary opposite him, and he now saw that part of the *hôtel meublé* had come across the street; he recognized it immediately for the smallest part. Before him stood the ridiculous and pathetic figure of a dirty little girl in rags, tatters, and furbelows, her legs clad in red silk stockings evidently intended for fuller, shapelier limbs; her feet slipped about in pattens. She had on a woman's bodice, a long flounced skirt pinned up to keep her from tripping. Her head was adorned by a torn straw hat, also contrived and created for the coquetry of maturity.

"Monsieur is so good," she began in a flute-like voice. "I have come to thank monsieur with all my heart."

Bulstrode looked toward Prosper for enlightenment, but that individual had cleverly disappeared.

"To thank me, my child? But for what?"

"Why, for the eggs and butter and sugar that monsieur was so good as to send me. I have made the cake. It is beautiful! Monsieur le cuisinier of this house baked it for me. It is perhaps a little flat—but that was because I got tired stirring. See—it says—" She had, so he now saw, a book under her arm; letting fall a fold of her cumbersome dress with both hands and opening a filthy cook-book, she laid it on the table, bending over it. "It says stir briskly half an hour." (Her "rs" rolled in her throat like tiny cannons in a rosy hollow.) "Quelle idée! It was *too* stupid! Half an hour! I just mixed it round once or twice and then—voilà! it has white on the top and shall have a candle."

"So you've made a cake?" he said kindly. "I'm sure it's a good one."

She nodded brightly. "It is for that I came to thank monsieur and to ask if he would accept a piece of it."

Poor Bulstrode, with dreadful suspicion, looked to see part of the horror immediately offered for his degustation. "I don't, my dear, understand. Why should you thank *me*—what had I to do with it?"

Her gesture was delightful. "But for monsieur it would not exist; for butter, eggs, and flour. Monsieur Prosper, when he gave them, said it was of the kindness of '*Monsieur Balstro*.'"

(Oh, Prosper! "I have corrupted *him*," his master thought. "He is as bad as I am!")

"Well, I'm very glad indeed," and he said it heartily. "But what did you especially want to make it for—with the one candle? That means one year old. Who's birthday may it then be?"

"It is the birthday of maman." She shut the book, and as she did so raised her great black eyes, which dirt and neglect could not spoil. There was in her appearance so little suggestion of

maternal care that Bulstrode nearly incredulously asked, "Your mother? And what, then, does your mother do?"

"She's a fish," informed the child tranquilly. And Bulstrode, although startled, could believe it. It too perfectly accounted for the cold-blooded indifference to this offspring. Not even a mermaid could have been guilty of so little care for her child. Still, he repeated:

"A fish?"

"Oui, a devil-fish in the aquarium at Bostock's. Oh, que c'est beau!" she clasped her little hands. "Maman wears a costume of red—quite a small, thin dress," she described eagerly. "And it is all spangles, like fire when she dives into the water. I have been; the waiter at the café downstairs took me. I screamed. I thought maman was drowned. But no—she comes up always!" The child threw her head back and lifted her eyes in ecstasy. "C'est magnifique!"

"What is your mother's name?"

"Mademoiselle Lascaze."

"And yours?"

"Simone."

"What do you do all day, Simone?"

"I wash and cook and sew and play—I have much to do—oh, much." She assumed an important air. "The bad air of the room makes maman ill, so she's out—'to breathe,' she says—and she locks me safely in. I play Bostock and dive like maman. And sometimes"—she lowered her voice, and looking back to see if they were alone—confided, "I cry."

"Ah!" sympathized Bulstrode.

"But, yes," she insisted, "when maman forgets to come home, and the night is so black; then the seamstress next door knocks on the wall, and I knock back for company."

"I see," he understood gently, "for company."

He rang for Prosper. "You will conduct mademoiselle home, Prosper, and give her everything she needs for her kitchen always."

"Yes, monsieur; I knew that monsieur would—"

At sight of Prosper the mite gathered up her voluminous skirts and bade her new friend a cordial good-by.

From the corrupted Prosper Bulstrode extracted what he wished to know concerning the child.

"It is of a scandalousness, monsieur! Four nights of the seven the poor little object is alone. The mother appears to have money enough, she pays her rent regularly, and there is therefore nothing to do. She sometimes even fetches her companions home with her, and Simone, when she is not making sport for them, is tied to a chair to keep her from falling off in her sleep."

Bulstrode expressed himself strongly, violently for him, went to see a lawyer and a charitable French countess and found out that so long as the mother did not actually ill-treat the child she could not be replaced by any other guardian.

"Mon cher ami," said the spirituelle lady, "leave the fish to her deviltry, and her child in her care. We are *fin de race*, if you like, and in direct opposition to your American progressive schemes, but we have a tradition that the family is sacred, and that, however bad it may be, a child is better off in its home than elsewhere. You will find it difficult to replace a mother by a *machine* or an *institution*, believe me."

And Bulstrode at the words felt a new sense of failure in philanthropies, and his benevolence seemed pure diletantism. What was he likely to accomplish in the case of this child? Nothing more than the momentary pleasure a few toys and a few hours of play could secure. "And yet," as he mused he philosophically put it to himself, "isn't it, after all, about the sum total any of us get out of destiny?"

In New York he would have quite known how to proceed in order to help the child, but in the face of French law and strong family prejudice he came up against a stone wall.

"I'm no sort of a real benefactor," he remorsefully acceded, "and I don't believe I'm fit to be trusted alone with the poor."

Nevertheless he did not relinquish his idea entirely, and confided Simone to Prosper's sympathetic care and that of an emotional maid-servant, with the result that a cleaning woman penetrated by hook or crook into the room of "the fish" and treated it to more *aqua pura* than the

piscatory individual had cognizance of outside of the aquarium.

The gentleman in this particular charity was surprised to find how simple it sometimes is to do good. In this case no one had come to him with a petition or a demand; on the contrary, a note of undeserved thanks had, with the strange little creature, been presented to him. It was so pleasantly easy to help a child! There were no *arrières pensées*—not that they would have troubled him, but there were none; there were no wire-pullings, no time infringements, no suggestion or criticism, no—he believed—expectations. Everything he could do was so annoyingly little! The charwoman cleaned, Simone had a complete wardrobe, the larder was full, and there remained nothing but toys to buy. The little thing was so womanly and capable—he had seen it and marvelled in their interviews at her age and accomplishments—her hands were so apt and almost creative, that toys seemed inadequate. She took her benefits charmingly; rushed over at the least provocation to pour out her gratitude, and Bulstrode, who hated thanks, liked these. Childhood, if it had been for sale on the Boulevard, even that he would have bought Simone if he could! As it was, he found himself pausing before a series of shops other than chemisiers—florists, and jewellers—shops where diminutive objects were displayed—and one afternoon had been standing ridiculously long in front of a certain window on the Rue de Rivoli when he was accosted by an agreeable and familiar voice.

"Jimmy! It isn't possible! don't tell me it has come so cruelly *soon*?"

The gentleman gave a violent, but an entirely happy start. Well, there were rewards then for people who didn't follow speeding motors through France! She was back and in Paris.

"What—has come so soon?" he asked.

Mrs. Falconer, on her way from a hat shop in her automobile, stopped by his side.

"Why, your second childhood, my dear man. Do you know what shop you are standing before?"

Bulstrode seemed to be perfectly aware of his dotage and to delight in it. Behind the big window pane there was a bright and very juvenile display.

Ships sailed there; dolls hung gaudily and smilingly aloft; giant parti-colored balls rounded out their harlequin sides; tiny dishes for pygmy festivals were piled with delicious carrots and artichokes on little white, blue-rimmed platters.

"Have you a moment to spare?" Bulstrode asked her.

"I have bought all my hats," she replied; "after that a woman's time hangs heavy on her hands."

"Ah!" he was as radiant as she had the genius for making him. "Come, then, in with me and help me choose a *doll*."

It was not the first purchase during the course of a long friendship which Bulstrode had made with this charming woman by his side, but for some reason he enjoyed it more than former errands. The bachelor and the childless woman were hard to please and their choice consumed an unconscionable time. As they lingered, the amiable shopman pressed various toys on monsieur and madame "*pour les enfants*," and the lady, finally depositing her friend with his parcels at the door of his hôtel, realized as she drove away that she knew nothing of the child for whom the purchases had been made. On her way up the Champs Elysées she smiled softly. "It's what you *share*," she mused, "what you give of *yourself*—with yourself—*that's* charity! Jimmy gives himself. I wonder who his new love is?"

Bulstrode, in order to share what should be his "new love's" ecstasy at first sight of the miraculous toy, sent for Simone. The Rue de Rivoli doll, on a small chair designed for diminutive ladies of the eighteenth century or for the king's dwarfs, held out stiff but cordial arms and was naturally, to a child, the first and sole object of the drawing-room.

"*Monsieur!*"

"For you, Simone."

"*Monsieur!*"

She said nothing else as she clasped her hands, and the color rushed into her face, but she felt the doll, touched reverently its feet, hair, dress, incontinently forgot Bulstrode, and quite suddenly, passionately, caught the image of life to her heart. Just over its blonde head, for it was nearly as large as herself, she met the gentleman's eyes.

"It's my child! I've prayed for it always, always! I've never had a doll, a *bébé*, m'sieu."

The tea-table with cakes and chocolate called them all too soon and, as Prosper served, the fountains sang, the heat stole through the garden and called up agreeable odors of sod and roses, the late afternoon sky spread its expanse over the terrace of the hôtel, where, perfectly happy both of them, animated by as gentle and harmless pleasure as any two in Paris that day, the child

of the people and an American gentleman chatted over their tea.

Bulstrode, being an original, erratic, and reckless giver of alms, quite by this time knew that, more than often, for him to give was, if not to regret, to have at least misgivings whether in the hands of some colder, less poetic person his money would not have accomplished more good. In the case of Simone he had, as usual, happily gone on with abandon, relegating any remorse to a future which he hoped would never arrive.

But the middle of July did come and with it came poor Jimmy's exquisite temptation. A telephone helped it dreadfully. There was something so wonderful in the fact that in a couple of hours he could, if he would, let himself reach the side of the lovely voice which called to him over the wires. And being nothing but a human man, he threw all his good resolves to the wind, and went down and stayed three days at Fontainebleau.

Out under the sky, where the elastic earth sprang softly beneath her feet and the embowered forests were sifted through with gold, Mary Falconer finally asked him, "And your doll, Jimmy? Have you broken her yet?" Bulstrode felt a guilty twinge, for he had not once thought of the little girl, nor did Mrs. Falconer's mention of her bring the subject near enough for Bulstrode to tell her the pretty story. He had other things to say, and many things not to say, and this, as it always did when he was with his lady, kept him very absorbed and occupied. On this occasion he forgot all about little Simone.

The night of his return Paris was *en fête* and in no sense impatient to reach his lonely house—for it seemed to him this night the loneliest house in the world—he walked without haste up town along the quays.

It was hard to forget that not fifty miles away he had left the cool forests, their tempting roads, their alluring alleys. He had forgotten that it was the annual celebration and that at this late hour the *fête* would be in full swing, and as he strolled meditating along the Seine the spirit of the gay populace—good-humor, reckless pleasure, and the *joie de vivre*—poured itself out around him like cordial, like a generous gift from an over-charged horn of cheer. In his gray clothes, modish panama, a little white rose plucked by a dear hand from the trellis at Fontainebleau still in his buttonhole, Bulstrode scarcely remarked the crowds or heard the music as he passed outdoor dancing stands and was jostled by a dancing throng.

His own street, as he approached it, welcomed him with a strong odor of onions and fried potatoes; it had apparently turned itself out of doors and all of the houses seemed to have emptied themselves into the narrow alley. A hurdy-gurdy playing before the *hôtel meublé* tinkled and jangled in the centre of a crowd of merry-makers, and the metallic melody and wild ascending octaves were the first sounds Bulstrode consciously heard since he left Fontainebleau.

In the midst of this rabble little Simone was dancing like a mad child, hair, arms, and feet flying; her voice, thin and piercing, every now and then above the rattle of the hand-organ, cried out the lines of a popular song whose meaning on her lips was particularly horrifying. The wine-shop family encircled her, encoring her vociferously. As she paused for breath the light from over the shop-door shone on her excited little face.



In the midst of this rabble little Simone was dancing

In the midst of this rabble little Simone was dancing

"I tired! Mon Dieu, que non! I could dance till morning. Play again, monsieur l'organiste. Play again."

Bulstrode, on the crowd's edge, watched her, and for once in his philanthropic history made no attempt to rescue. As Prosper let his master in he said:

"It's a shame, isn't it, monsieur? The people over there have let her run quite crazy. The poor little thing! Heaven knows where the mother is!"

Of which celestial knowledge Bulstrode had his doubts. It was close to twelve, and dismissing Prosper for the night, he took his cigar out on the terrace and to what solitude his garden might extend. Before long the noise of the music subsided, the people, tired out with hours of festivity, dispersed, and the alley settled into quiet. From the distance now and then came the soft, dull explosion of fireworks, the rumble and roar of Paris was a little accelerated; otherwise the silence about Bulstrode's garden grew and deepened as the night advanced.

It was rare for him to allow himself to be the object of his own personal consideration, or that indeed he at all thought of himself, and when he did the man he had long ignored had his revenge and made him pay up old scores.

On the late afternoon of this very day he was to have walked for miles through the Fontainebleau woods with Mrs. Falconer, and instead he had fled. Pleading a sudden summons to Paris, he left Fontainebleau.

It was well past four o'clock when he at last threw his cigar away and rose. He had been musing all night in his chair.

A sudden gust of noise blew down the quiet little street, the sound of loud singing and the shrill staccato of a woman's laugh. By the time the revellers had passed his house and the hubbub had died away, Bulstrode, with an idea at length of going up to his room, walked across the salon and prepared to extinguish the electricity, but the sound of some one tapping without caught his ear, and going over to the window that gave on the street, he looked out. From end to end the alley was deserted except for the figure of a woman. As he saw in the ruddy light of early morning she huddled against the threshold of the *hôtel meublé*—knocking persistently at the

door. The tattered gauze of her dress, whose bold *decolletée* left her neck and shoulders bare, a garland of roses on the bandeaux of her black hair, she epitomized the carnival just come to its end—its exhaustion, its excess, spent at length, surfeited, knocking for entrance at last to rest. Bulstrode, as he remarked the sinuous figure that swayed as the woman stood, exclaimed to himself with illumination: "Why, she's the *fish*, of course! Simone's mother! And this is the state in which she goes to the miserable child!"

As, knocking at intervals, the object leaned there a few moments longer, evidently scarcely able to stand, his pity wakened and he slowly left the window, shut in its blinds, and crossed his ante-chamber, where the artificial light of electricity was met by the full sunshine of the breaking day streaming in through the open window of his terrace. Not entirely sure of his motive or to what excess of folly it might lead him, he nevertheless opened wide his front door, only to see that the woman on the opposite street had gone. She had been let in. With a glance of relief up and down the street where the *confetti* in disks of lilac and yellow and red lay in dirty piles or swam on the flushing gutters that sparkled in the light, Bulstrode shot to his door on the Parisian world and after a *nuît blanche* went upstairs to his rooms.

And there had intensely come to him during the period of his dressing the next morning after a tardy wakening the idea of taking the child, of—he was certain it could be done—buying the mother off. He would, in short, if he could, legally adopt the Parisian *gamine* for his own. It would give him a distinct interest, and life was empty for want of one; this, in a manner, however short of perfect, would supply the need of a loving living creature in his environment and would—his thrill at the idea proved to him how lonely he had been—give him companionship and a responsibility of a tender, personal sort. He could make a home at last for a child. Men are more paternal than they are credited with being, and Bulstrode directly foresaw delightful *causeries* in the future with—(he knew many women)—*with one woman* whose pretty taste, whose wit and humor, should counsel him in his new rôle. Mrs. Falconer would dress Simone—her hand should be wonderfully in it all. Bulstrode had let his fancy linger over the scheme. Certainly, during the hour in which he spun his fanciful plan, there was not one bar to its execution. Nor did there come to him any hint of its intrinsic sterility, or the idea that it was possibly an excuse for the interweaving of another interest more closely with his life—no idea that he was simply strengthening an old bond, or by means of this little tug pushing a mighty vessel nearer port.

He almost happily mused until a nursery grew out of thin air, a child's little garments lay on a chair, and festivities, whose charm is of the most mysterious, illuminated his reverie. Bulstrode, even without the shudder of the climatician, contemplated the rigors of his own country, for a rosy room grew out of his dream, fire-lit and fragrant with fir and holly, and in the centre shone The Tree, whose shiny globes and marvels were reflected till they danced in a child's eyes.

There had been an hour earlier the quick, brusque dash of a French thunder-storm, and the cooled air came refreshingly from the garden as Bulstrode stood out on the terrace before going into the noonday breakfast. Prosper, fetching his master's coffee at nine o'clock, had been informed that they were leaving Paris that day and received instructions as to the setting in order of the hôtel before returning it to its proprietor. Where his wanderings were to take him Bulstrode had not as yet made up his mind. It, after all, mattered so very little what a bachelor did with his leisure! It was the height of the season along the seacoast and a dozen places brilliantly beckoned; there were tri-weekly boats to the country, where he should most properly be.

"There is," he with recurrent leeway to his inclinations reflected, "always plenty of time to decide what one does not want to do!"

As he glanced at the little breakfast spread temptingly there for him on the terrace he was arrested by the sound of French voices in quick, agitated discussion, and looked up to see the unceremonious entrance of quite a little band of people who had in point of fact penetrated his seclusion. In a second of time a group was before him and he remembered afterward that certain figures in a twinkling assumed familiar shapes: the wine-shop keeper, his wife, one or two other patrons of the hôtel; but in the centre—he was sure of her!—pale and staring, stood little Simone, her big doll clasped in her arms.

Before the gentleman could ask their errand Madame Branchard, eager to tell it, pushed forward. Bulstrode afterward, when he thought of the scene, could always distinctly see her important red face, sleek, oily hair, and in spite of summer heat the crocheted shawl over her cotton gown.

"We decided at once to address to monsieur, who is so good"—(he was growing accustomed to the formula) "to monsieur who has been so like a father to the poor little thing. Not but that we are ready ourselves to do all we can for her—she is so sweet, so intelligent!"

"The sweet, intelligent child" appeared, as Bulstrode's pitying gaze, never leaving her, saw, to have shrunk overnight. In their midst she stood of a ridiculous smallness, her big doll nearly hiding her and over its blonde head Simone's eyes peered pathetically into, as it were, a vague and terrifying world. Bulstrode asked shortly in the face of the theatrical prelude:

"What is this all about? What have you come to tell me?"

"Ah, monsieur!" Madame Branchard's voice, particularly suited to retailing the tragedies of the streets, quavered. "There has been a *malheur*—it is too horrible—the mother!"

"Stop!" Bulstrode put out his hand. "Simone!"

The little thing dragged herself to him with a new timidity, as though she believed him in league with the world against her.

"Come," he encouraged, "come out here on the terrace, where you have so often played with your doll, and don't be frightened, *mon enfant*; everything will be all right."

When he had so settled her in the smallest of chairs he went back to the other bit of Paris street-life which had seethed in to him.

Madame Branchard, whom his manner had reduced to, for her, marvellous quiet and ease, approached impressively and lowered her voice as deeply as it would fall.

"Mademoiselle Lascaze, whom monsieur knows has been my tenant for months past, is dead—dead, monsieur!"

Bulstrode echoed, "Dead?" and his first thought was: "It was not she, then, whom I saw striving for entrance this morning. Ah, poor creature! Drowned?"

"Monsieur then knows?"

Knows—how should he know? He had thought of the aquarium and her often repeated feat.

"Monsieur is right, she is drowned; but it is not the aquarium—it is the Seine. It appears," the wine-merchant's wife went on, "that last night she made *la fête* in the streets. We over here lock up, well, at a decent hour, as monsieur will understand. Those who are in stay, those who are out—well, monsieur will understand—"

Yes, he understood. Would she go on?

"Mademoiselle Lascaze had evidently lost her key of entry—so it appears. We have this story from her comrades, a bad lot, like herself. She tried to get in about five o'clock—they left her knocking at the door. She must then have wandered the streets for an hour, for it was six when they met her again by chance quite by the Pont des Arts. They all had something to drink and started across the river, when the poor thing offered to give an exhibition of her circus feat and, before anyone could stop her, had dived off the bridge into the Seine."

He had, then, seen her knocking there in the dawn, and if he had hastened a little—not held conventionally back—

"It is all *en règle*," assured Madame Branchard. "As my husband will tell monsieur, he has been to the morgue to identify her."

The wine-merchant now at his cue, nodded impressively. "Mais oui, I assure monsieur she was quite natural—and she was une belle femme tout le même—"

His wife glanced at him scornfully. "She was a bad mother, and all the house will tell you so. Many times, monsieur, I have gone in with my pass-key and taken the poor little thing downstairs in my arms to give her all the supper she would have had, and many a time, on cold nights, when there was not a stick of fire in their room, and the woman abroad—many a time I have had her sleep in our bed with us—my husband will tell monsieur."

The wine-merchant nodded assent. "She speaks the truth, monsieur."

Bulstrode found presence of mind to wonder. "I suppose Mademoiselle Lascaze left debts?"

The husband and wife exchanged glances.

"*En vérité*, monsieur," confessed Madame Branchard, "she has left a few, but they are small and not significant; a hundred francs will cover them. It is not for our pockets we are come to monsieur."

Here the sentimentality having been disposed of by the woman, the husband broke in:

"It is like this, Monsieur Balstro" (Bulstrode saw how intimately the *hôtel meublé* knew him): "In a few moments even the authorities will be here to take charge of the woman's effects and Simone will become the property of the State. She has no relatives, as Monsieur will understand. Thinking, therefore, that monsieur, *who is so good*, might for some reason care to take an interest in the child's future—"

Branchard coughed and paused. Having given Mr. Bulstrode ample time to speak, to show some signs of life and of his usual quick benevolence, and being greeted with nothing other than

quiet, meditative silence, the merchant shrugged and comprehensively relinquished suppositions and hopes in one large gesture.

"In which case" (evidently that of taking for granted that Bulstrode was less good than they had supposed), "in that case we shall put in a plea ourselves for Simone and adopt her."

Madame's voice, now in full and customary volume, expressed frankly *her* goodness. "We have five children and our means are modest, but"—and she put it sublimely—"one is not a mother for nothing."

Her tirade, however, was quite lost on Bulstrode, who was occupied with his own projects of benevolence. Turning to this contingent of the *hôtel meublé* a back scarcely more imperturbable than his face had been, he went out of the room to the terrace, where Simone sat just as he had left her. She was, on her low chair, so tiny that in order more nearly than ever before to approach her little point of view, to come into her little sphere, Bulstrode knelt down on one knee.

"Don't look so frightened, my child. Nothing will harm you—I assure you of that; don't you"—he called her loyally to answer—"don't you believe me, Simone?"

The little thing drew in a struggling breath and whispered: "Oui, m'sieu."

"Good!" He was smiling at her and had taken her ice-cold, dirty, little hands. "You are fond of me, Simone—you like a little M'sieu Balstro'?"

"Oh," she caught at her frightened voice and more clearly whispered, "oh, oui, m'sieu!"

"Bien encore!"

He wanted tactfully to break the ice which shock and terror had formed around the poor little heart, and yet not to prolong the moment.

"*Voyons*," he said to her lightly, as if he were only to bid her come and play in his garden, and not ask her to decide her destiny. "*Voyons*, how would you like to come and live with me? to have toys and pretty clothes and good things to eat—to be"—the bachelor put it bravely—"to be *my* little girl. How, Simone, would you like it?"

If further startled she was humanized by his warmth, which was melting her; her breast heaved, her lips trembled, and she asked: "Et puis—maman?"

Here Madame Branchard, in whom all feelings were subordinate to curiosity and motherhood, had approached until she stood directly behind the two on the terrace. Tears had sprung to her eyes and she sniffled and wiped them frankly away with her hand.

Bulstrode, singularly relieved by her appearance, turned and asked her, "What does she then know?"

"Nothing, m'sieur, nothing at all."

Simone got up on her feet and her big doll fell with a crash on the marble of the terrace and broke in a dozen pieces, but the catastrophe did not touch her.

"And maman?" she repeated. "Where is she? She did not come home last night?"

Bulstrode had descended to one knee in order to approach her, but Madame Branchard got down on both knees and tenderly put her arms around the child.

"Look, ma petite—your mother has gone away forever to a beautiful country, and she has left you here to be a good girl and do whatever this kind gentleman says. Will you go to be his little girl? He will give you everything in the world." She closed with this magnificent promise, whose breadth and wealth no child-mind could grasp. In order to give her more complete liberty in which to make her decision the wine-merchant's wife, after kissing her, set her free.

Simone made no audible reflection of wonder at her seeming desertion, no exhibition of distress, no melodramatic outburst of grief or surprise. She stood silent, absorbed, desolate, and ashamed, twisting in and out between her frail little fingers the fringe of Madame Branchard's black shawl.

"Or," brightly continued the good woman, "you can come home with me and play with Marie and Jeannette and have what we have. You can be my little girl, as you will—it is for you to decide—chez moi, or with this bon monsieur."

Was it fair of them—thus to lay on her six years the burden of her own destiny?

Simone raised her head; her cheeks had reddened a little at Madame Branchard's last words. She was unable to grasp the benefits that Bulstrode's magnificence offered, but she knew Marie and Jeannette—she knew the hands of Madame Branchard could tuck one in at night, and how warm and soft was the bosom on which she had already wept her little griefs. There were many beautiful things in the world, but Simone just then only wanted one. Madame Branchard was not

her mother—but she was still a mother! Simone whispered so low that only the woman heard:

"I will go with you."

Prosper having embarked on a sea of indiscretion, went through the day consistently. With a love of the melodramatic in his Latin temperament he had admitted the *hôtel meublé sans cérémonie*: and late that afternoon he gave entrance to another group of quite a different order, and without formality ushered the lady and her friends to the terrace, where the solitary inhabitant of another man's house was taking a farewell beverage before leaving Paris.

"We have caught you in time, Jimmy!" Mrs. Falconer made a virtue of it. "If you are absconding with the Montensier treasures, then let me show Molly and the Marquis at least what has been left behind."

His bags and boxes in the hall, his automobile at the door, and Bulstrode himself in travelling trim, it looked very much like a flight, indeed. Miss Molly and the Marquis, it transpired, were able to explore for themselves and to find in the gallery and salons pictures and objects of interest to excuse a prolonged absence.

"They're engaged," Mrs. Falconer explained to her host. "Isn't it ridiculous? As you know, she hasn't a cent in the world, and his family are not in the secret, but Molly and De Presle-Vaulx *are*, and I am, and I brought them off in pity for a spin to Paris."

The apparition of the lady, whose mocking beauty had a fresh charm every time he saw her—her worldly wisdom and her keen reasonableness—made, as he stood talking with her, his past debauch in philanthropies seem especially grotesque. With a long breath of joy at the sight of her Bulstrode also realized how wonderfully separated from her the introduction of another life into his environment would have made him.

"Your garden is a waste," the lady criticised, "dusty and dull. I don't wonder you're getting away. Fontainebleau, too, was only a *faute de mieux*, and I have left it. One should get really far away at this season. It's the time when only the persons who are actually bred in its stones can stay in Paris—certainly the birds of passage may now, if ever, fly."

"We are going to Trouville," she said; "we are all going to motor through Normandy. Won't you come—won't you come?" He shook his head.

Mrs. Falconer looked across the terrace to where a little chair had been overturned, and on the floor by its side lay a broken doll.

"Jimmy!" she laughed in triumph at the sight. "You *have* broken your doll!"

Bulstrode said: "Yes, beyond repair, and I don't want another." Then in a few words, briefly, a little impatient, and still smarting under the child's defection, he gave her the story.

Listening, absorbed, her charming eyes on him or at one moment turned suspiciously away, the lady heard him to the end, and at the end said softly:

"Jimmy, my poor Jimmy! What have you nearly done! What *would* people have thought? Not that it matters in the least—it's what people *do* that counts—but oh, I tremble for your next folly!"

"It might"—he spoke with something like bitterness—"be less harmless and leave me less alone."

She had finished a glass of iced tea, put her goblet down on the tray and rose, coming over to where Bulstrode stood; she lightly laid her hand on his arm.

"You are, then, so very lonely? So lonely that you would be capable of doing this foolish thing? Oh, you would have found, as I have found, that it is those things which come into our lives, not those which we by force *take*, which mean all we want them to mean! This wasn't *your child!*" Mrs. Falconer's face softened as he had never seen it. "Nor yet is she the child of some woman you love. Believe me, it would have made you far lonelier if it so happened—if you should ever come to love—if you ever had loved——"

Bulstrode interrupted her abruptly:

"Yes, in that case I should no doubt be glad that Simone had gone back on me." He waited silent for a second, and then continued gently, "I *am* glad, very glad indeed!"

IV

IN WHICH HE MAKES THREE PEOPLE HAPPY

There were times when Bulstrode decided that he never could see the woman he loved any more: there were times when he felt he must follow her to the ends of the world, just in order to assure himself that she was alive and serene. Such is the gentleman's character and point of view, that she must always be serene, no matter what his own troubled emotions might be.

He had the extraordinary idea that he could not himself be happy or make a woman happy over the dishonor of another man. It was old-fashioned and unworldly of Bulstrode: still, that was the way he was constituted.

It was on one of the imperious occasions when he felt as if he must follow her to the ends of the earth, that he steered his craft toward a little town on the edge of the Norman coast, to a very fashionable bit of France—Trouville. As soon as he understood that Mrs. Falconer was to be in Normandy for the race week, he packed his things and ran down and put up at the Hôtel de Paris. On this occasion the gentleman followed so fast that he overleaped his goal, and arrived at the watering-place before the others appeared. Bulstrode took his own rooms, and in response to a telegram, engaged the Falconers' apartments. He liked the way the little salon gave on the heavenly blue sea, and with a nice fancy to make it something more home-like for his friend to begin with, he filled it with flowers ... ran what lengths he dared in putting a few rare vases and several pieces of old Italian damask here and there.

"Falconer," he consoled himself, "will be too taken up with his horses to notice the *inside* of anything but a stable! And I shall tell the others that the hôtel proprietor is a collector: most of these Norman innkeepers are collectors." And, as his idea grew, he went to greater lengths, with the curiosity shops on either side the Rue de Paris to tempt him. The result was that when Mrs. Falconer came, she found the hôtel room wonderfully mellow and harmonious, and as a woman who revels in beauty she responded to its charm. She was delighted, her eyes sparkled, her cheeks glowed. And Jimmy Bulstrode had a moment of high happiness as she looked at him and touched with her pretty hands the flowers he had himself arranged. It was a delightful moment, a moment that was much to him.

The Falconers arrived with the usual lot of servants and motors and, moreover, with a racing outfit, for Falconer had decided to enter his English filly, *Bonjour*, for the events of August. There was also with them a Miss Molly Malines and a young sprig of nobility, the Marquis de Preslevaulx, to whom Bulstrode was a trifle paternal.

"He can't, at least, be after Molly's *millions*," he reflected; "he can't, at any rate, be a *fortune* hunter, for the girl's face is the only fortune she has!"

On a bright and beautiful morning, the first of all the days for many weeks—for Bulstrode reckoned his calendar in broken bits, beginning a New Year each time he saw his lady again—a bright and beautiful morning he walked out at the fashionable hour of noon and turned into the Rue de Paris.

The eyes of many women followed Bulstrode.

Being an early riser, he had already taken a brisk walk over the cliffs, had swum out beyond the buoys, and now in his flannels, his panama, a gay rose in the lapel of his coat, amongst the many debonnaire and pleasing people who filled the little fishing town, his was a distinguished figure. He trusted very much to instinct to discover his friend, and after a few moments found her at the extreme end of the street which the papers of Paris tell you is "the most worldly and fashionable in any part of the Continent, during race week at Trouville." Mary Falconer was of course dressed in the very height of the mode. She looked up and saw Bulstrode before he saw her, but she could wait until he made his leisurely way down to her side. She waited for him a great deal. He did not know how much, but then her point of view and her feelings have never come into the history. It amused her to make him her many clever little bits of speech, for he was so appreciative of everything she said, and looking up at him now as he approached she said: "These people never seem to have anything to do, do they? Leisure is like money: to enjoy thoroughly either money or leisure one should only have a little of each. Now for us good-for-nothings who have no occupation it doesn't make much difference what we do or where we do it!"

The lady's camp-stool had been set down at the end of the street. Those who are not promenading opened little *chaises pliantes* and watched from their little seats. Mrs. Falconer sat facing the ocean, or what was visible of it between the bathing tents. Pagodas gay with children's shovels and bright pails, striped bonbons and the sea of muslins, ribbons and feathers and sunshades of the midsummer crowd. All the capitals of Europe had poured themselves into Trouville, and the resort overflowed with beauty and fashion.

"It's perfectly bewitching," Bulstrode said to her, "perfectly bewitching, and it makes one feel as though there were nothing but pleasure in the world."

She wore a white dress and her hat was bright with flowers. She opened her rose-lined parasol over her head.

"Jimmy," she said abruptly, and brought his eyes to hers like a flash, for he had been looking over the scene, "do you know I begin to see where the innkeeper found his rare treasures; *there are a great many other things* that suggest them in this little street!"

Bulstrode replied, "You don't want him to take them away, do you?"

She shook her head. "No," she said slowly, "they have been a great pleasure, but I don't want to *buy* them from him, either."

"I don't *think* he'd sell them," Bulstrode was certain of it, "they're extremely precious in his eyes."

"I'm a good judge of works of art, however," she said after a moment, "that is to say, I know a good thing when I see it. There was a little picture in one of the shops back of me that I would have given a lot to own."

Her friend exclaimed: "Are you going to buy it! That is to say, will Falconer buy it for you?"

"My dear soul—with his horse running to-morrow! At any rate, the bijou is already bought above my head. I went in yesterday to see what was the least they would take for it, and found the Prince Pollona, the Englishman who buys for the Wallace Collection, and somebody who, they tell me, was the Rockefeller of St. Petersburg. Well, my little picture was what they all wanted, and you can imagine that *I* retired from the running...! But I tell you this," she said, "only to show you how very good my taste is, and so that you may rely on my selections."

Bulstrode smiled in a way that said he thought he might rely on her, but still he asked rather quizzically, "Well, what are you going to recommend to me *now*?"

The lady at the moment, not having anything in mind, looked suddenly up, gave him whimsically:

"Molly and her Marquis."

The two young people with Jack Falconer were coming slowly along the Rue de Paris toward them. The grace of the girl, her freshness under her wide hat where flowers and ribbons danced and blended; the radiant pleasure she exhaled, the swing of her dress, her youth, expressed so happily the joy of life, recommended themselves easily in a flash....

"Oh, *Molly*—she's perfect!"

"And the Marquis?"

"He is perfectly in *love*," ... Bulstrode allowed him so much.

"My dear friend, remember I know my *objets d'art*."

"Oh, as an *objet d'art*...!"

Bulstrode took the young man in: his white immaculateness, his boutonnière, his panama—(not less than forty dollars a straw, as Jimmy knew) his monocle.

"As an *objet d'art*," he further conceded to her, "he's perfect, too!"

"As an *homme de race*," said the American lady eagerly, with the true Republican appreciation of blood and title, "as an *homme du monde*, as a..."

"Title?" he finished for her. "Oh, the Presle-Vaulx are all right! I'll grant him a perfect title, sound as a bell, first Crusade—*Léonce de Presle-Vaulx main droite, or sur azur—Pour toi seule*. It's a good old tradition—a good old name."

She scented his lack of sympathy. "Oh, I'll stand for him, Jimmy. I know the *pâte*, as they say. I know the ring and the tone; and you must, at my valuation, take him."

"Molly, dear lady, has done the taking." Bulstrode lifted his hat as the trio came up. "And what, after all, can we—the rest of us do?"

"The rest of them" watched the young couple with mingled emotions: Mary Falconer with all the romance in her, and in spite of unusual cool reasonableness she had a feminine share—Jimmy with the sympathy of a kindly nature, a certain sting of jealousy at the decidedly perfect completeness of young love, and with a singularly wide-awake practical common sense for an impulsive gentleman whose pleasure in life is to pour into people's hands the things they most long for and cannot without him ever hope to enjoy!

Bulstrode, although owning his share of horse-flesh and a proper number of automobiles and keeping, for the best part of the time, a yacht out of commission, was a sport only in a certain sense of the word. The people who liked him best and who were themselves able to judge, said he was a "dead game sport," but Jimmy smiled at this and knew that the human element interested him in life above all, and that he only cared for amusements as they helped others to enjoy. He was backing Falconer's horse, although he felt certain the winnings would go to the Rothschild's gelding. On the afternoon, however, when De Presle-Vaulx came up to him in the Casino and said: "On what are you going to put your money, Monsieur?" Bulstrode looked at him thoughtfully. He had stood by the young man the night before at baccarat and seen him lose enough to keep a little family of Trouville fisherfolk for a year.

"Are you going to play the races, Marquis?"

"But naturally!" ...

De Presle-Vaulx had an attractive frankness, and his smile was—Bulstrode understood what a girl would think about it!

"... But of course! One doesn't come to Trouville in *la grande semaine* not to play!"

He put his hand cordially on Bulstrode's arm.

"Entre nous," he said, "I don't believe Falconer's horse has a chance against Rothschild's Grimace. And you?"

"Oh, I shall back Jack Falconer's mare," the older man replied.

The Marquis played with his moustache. "She doesn't stand a show."

Bulstrode was walking slowly down the grand staircase by his companion's side. "And you will back Grimace?" He ignored the young man's prognostication.

De Presle-Vaulx said ingenuously: "I? Oh, seriously, I'm not betting. I lost at baccarat last night, and I haven't a sou for the race."

He looked boyish and regretful. The American put his hand in his pocket and took out his portefeuille.

"Let me," he suggested pleasantly, "be your banker."

The light dry rustle of French bank-notes came agreeably from between his fingers.

The young man hesitated, then put out his hand.

"A thousand thanks, Monsieur, you are too good—I *will* back Grimace, and after the race——"

Jimmy handed him the notes to choose from.

At the stair foot stood Molly and Mrs. Falconer.

"We went this afternoon to see Jack's horse," Miss Malines said to the Marquis. Whatever she said, no matter how general, she said to him—others might gather what they could. "Bon Jour's a beauty—a dear, and as fit as possible. Oh, she's in great form! Jack's crazy about her, and so is the jockey. I know Bon Jour will win! I'm going to put twenty-five francs on her to-morrow."

Mary Falconer smiled radiantly. "And you, Jimmy," she took for granted, "are of course betting on the favorite?"

"If you mean Grimace—" his tone was indifferent—"no, I shall back your husband's horse."

"*Jimmy!*" Her tone changed, and her expression as well.

De Presle-Vaulx saw it, and he knew what women's voices can mean. He was a Frenchman, and he understood what a slow, delicious flush, a darkening of the eyes, a sharp note in the voice can signify of feeling—as well as of gratitude, surprise and a little scorn. There was all this in Mary Falconer's exclamation and her face.

"And Maurice!" Molly said, "of course, you're doing the same?"

The Marquis met his fiancée's clear eyes, her girlish enthusiasm and her confidence. He bit his lip, shrugged, hesitated, looked at Bulstrode, at Molly, and laughed. The presence of the others and the custom of his country made it only a pretty courtesy—he lifted Molly's hand to his lips.

"Of course—*chère Mademoiselle*, I am backing Bon Jour with all my heart, *cela va sans dire!*"

Miss Malines regarded her friend with a pretty grimace and a smile.

As they walked along together all four, Bulstrode said to himself:

"He's a sport, a true sport—that's five thousand francs to the bad. He was game, however, he's a good sport and, better yet, he's a true lover!"

Whether or not Mary Falconer really had an exalted idea of the merits of Bon Jour, or whether she thoroughly understood the situation, how was her friend to know?

Falconer adored the horse, and the lady showed in the matter, as in everything else, a fine loyalty to her husband, which was undoubtedly one of the reasons why—but this is going too deeply into the domain of Bulstrode's feelings, which, since he keeps them honorably sealed, it is unworthy to surprise even in the interest of psychology.

Bulstrode saw that his friend was pleased: her color, her mounting spirits at dinner, showed it. She spoke with interest of the races, and with confidence greater than she had hitherto evinced in the fortunes of her husband's racer—indeed she talked horse to Molly's edification, her husband's delight, and Bulstrode's admiration. All this—the sense that the party was, so to speak, with him—put Jack Falconer in the best of spirits, and the unruffled course of the dinner, and, above all, the humor of the elder of the two ladies, quite repaid Jimmy Bulstrode for the sure loss of his stakes.

"Does she really think that I have faith in the horse?" he wondered—meeting her charming eyes over the glass of champagne she was drinking. They did not answer in text his question, but their glow and the light of content in them answered for him other questions which were perhaps of greater interest.

She was not unhappy. All his life, since his acquaintance with her, it had been his aim, in so far as he could aid it, that she should not be unhappy. His idea of affection was that in all cases it should bring to the object—joy. In his own life these things which brought him, no matter how pleasant they might be, the after taste of regret and misery he strove with all his manliness to tear out: "and surely," he so argued, "if my presence in her life cause her for one moment anything but peace, it would be better that we had never looked into each other's eyes."

There was nothing especially buoyant, in the attitude of the young Marquis! His inclination to feminine will had cost him—he was so familiar with the turf and the next day's programme to feel sure—five thousand francs, which he had not the means to pay.

Later in the evening, very much later, indeed well on to one o'clock, Bulstrode, wandering through the baccarat rooms—for no other purpose, it would be said from his indifferent air, than to study types—saw Maurice de Presle-Vaulx just leaving the Casino.

Bulstrode's air was as friendly and as naïve as though he had not a pretty clear idea of just how the tide of events was fluctuating toward misfortune in the case of this young nobleman.

"What do you say," he suggested, "to getting something to drink or eat? What do you say to a piece of *perdreau* and some champagne?"

The Frenchman followed the older man, who in contrast to his pallor looked the picture of health and spirits. Bulstrode cheerily led him to a small table in the corner of the restaurant, where they sat opposite one another, and for a little time applied themselves in silence to the light supper served them.

The Marquis drank more than he ate, and Bulstrode dutifully finished the game and toast, quite glad, in truth, to break the fast of a long evening which he had spent in the close rooms: for no other reason than unseen, to befriend—and unasked, to chaperone Molly's lover. Finally, when he felt that the right moment to say something had come, he smiled at the young man, and said frankly:

"Voyons, mon ami, don't you feel that you can talk to me a little more freely than you could possibly to even so kind and charming a friend as Mrs. Falconer? We are not of the same race, perhaps, but then under certain circumstances such distinctions are not important. How do you"—he handled the words as though in presenting them to the young man he was afraid they might prick him—"How do *you* now stand?—I mean to say, the luck has been rather against you, I'm afraid."

Bulstrode would never be so near forty again, and De Presle-Vaulx was a spoiled child—at all events, all that could be spoiled in him had been taken care of by his mother, and in his own way he had spoiled a large part of what remained. He looked up smartly, for he had been following the pattern of the table-cloth. If the frankness of the other threatened to offend him, as he met the kind eyes of the American he found nothing there that could do otherwise than please him. He shrugged with his national habit, then threw out his hands without making any verbal reply, but his smile and his gesture comprehended so much that Bulstrode intelligently exclaimed:

"Oh, but you don't mean to say—?"

"I have not, monsieur, much to lose," the scion of an old house replied simply. "We have the reputation of being poor; but to-night and last night have quite 'wiped me out,' as you say in America. Je suis ruiné."

Bulstrode lit his cigar. De Presle-Vaulx took from his pocket one of his own cigarettes and puffed at it gently. Bulstrode smoked silently, and thought of the young man without looking at him. He liked him, and did not understand him at all: not at all! He supposed, that with his different traditions, his Puritanism, his New World point of view, he could *never* understand him, but he would enjoy trying to do so, for aside from the quality of spoiled boy, there was something of the man in De Presle-Vaulx to which the New Englander extremely responded.

His next remark was impersonal:

"Bon Jour, then, you think is not likely——?"

"*Mon cher Monsieur!* ... She is not even mentioned for place! Even in the event of her winning," De Presle-Vaulx was gloomy, "I should be able to discharge my debt to you and nothing more." Again he looked up quickly. "I shall, of course, be quite able to discharge *that*; I only mean to say that *en somme*, I am *roulé complètement roulé*."

"What, then, are you going to do?"

De Presle-Vaulx looked at the end of his cigarette as though he took counsel from it, and said measuredly:

"There is, in my position, but one thing possible for a man to do."

"You mean to say, marry, make a rich marriage?"

The Marquis flashed at him:

"A month ago, yes! that would have been the one way out of my embarrassment: but I am no longer in the market. It is the other alternative."

Bulstrode in no case caring to hear put in words a tragically disagreeable means of solving the problems of debt and love, and having less faith in this extravagant, explosive alternative than in the *marriage de convenance*, did not urge the Frenchman further. He simply brought out—his quiet eyes fixed on the other:

"And the little girl?—Molly—Miss Malines?—"

He gave him three chances to think of the pretty child, and for the first De Presle-Vaulx's expression changed. He had with a nonchalance submitted to the discussion of his fortune and his fate, but now he distinctly showed dignity.

"Don't, I beg of you, *speak* of Mademoiselle Malines!" and then he said more gently, "mille pardons, mon cher ami!"

Bulstrode smoked his Garcia meditatively. He had not attempted the solving of other people's questions, had not played the good fairy for a long time. He had the hazy feeling—such as he often experienced just before stepping into the mysterious excitement of doing some good deed, of undergoing the effects of a narcotic which put to sleep reason and practical common-sense, and left alive only a desire to befriend. In this case, determined not again to be the victim of sentimentality, determined for once to unite common sense and common humanity, he forcibly dissipated the haze and said:

"Your family! I have, as you know, understood from Mrs. Falconer, the facts of the case. You must not be formal with me." He smiled delightfully. "I am an American; you know we have all sorts of barbarous privileges. We rush in quite where the older races fear to tread ... and Molly Malines' father is an old friend of mine."

(Mr. Bulstrode did not say what kind of an old friend! or even allow himself to remember the I.O.U.s and loans that his bankers had made to the visionary, good-humored, sanguine, unfortunate stockbroker.)

"Your family—how do they take the idea of your marriage to a poor American?"

De Presle-Vaulx pushed his coffee cup aside, leaned his arms on the table, bent over, and said with more confidence:

"Oh, they are entirely opposed to it. That's one reason, to be quite frank with you, why I have been so reckless."

He added: "My mother has refused her consent, and I can never hope to alter my father's attitude. I have their letters to-day as well as telegrams from Presle-Vaulx—they bid me 'come home immediately,' and so far as my people are concerned, their refusal puts an end to the affair!"

There was a mixture of amusement and reproach in Bulstrode's tone—"and you have found nothing better to do than to throw away at baccarat what money you had, and have found no other solution for the future than to...?" he eyed the young man keenly, and a proper severity came into his expression. "Nonsense," he said, and repeated the word with more indulgence: "nonsense, *mon ami!*"

His reproof was borne:

"We are an old race, M. Bulstrode——"

Bulstrode had heard this allocution before. It gave lee-way to so much; permitted so much; excused so much!

"... I don't need to tell you our traditions, or recall our customs. You of course know them. If I marry without my parents' consent I shall probably, during my mother's lifetime, never see her again, and I am her only son. It means that I sever all relations with my people."

Bulstrode knocked the ash off his cigar and said thoughtfully:

"It's too bad! A choice, if there *is* one, is always too bad. There should in real things *be* no choice. As soon as such a contingent arises, it proves that neither thing is really worth while! When a man loves a woman there can be no choice. My dear friend, when a *man*"—he paused—"loves—there is nothing in the world *but the woman*."

The Marquis looked at the fine face of the elder man. Years had, with their gentle history, and kindly records, touched Jimmy Bulstrode lightly. Every experience made him better to look at; "like a good picture," Mrs. Falconer had said, "painted by a master, and only growing more splendid." Nothing of the worldliness of the *roué* marked his expression. His memories were clear and honorable, and the Frenchman experienced a sensation of surprise and also one of enlightenment as he looked at him and responded to his expression. He had never seen any one quite like this man of the world, could not think of his prototype in France.

He repeated:

"Nothing but the woman in the world—? Honor—" Bulstrode quickly added, "and the woman—they are synonymous."

In watching his companion he wondered in how much of a tangle the Frenchman's mind was, and just how deep his feet were sunk in the meshes of conventionality and tradition, and decided: "Oh, is it too much to believe that he could——!"

As if in answer to his thoughts, De Presle-Vaulx spoke in the simplest manner possible:

"J'aime Molly."

Quite surprised at the simplicity, Bulstrode beamed on him and waited.

Then the other added:

"But I can't ask any woman to share poverty and debts, and I have no way of making a living; I'm not bred for it."

"You are not an invalid?"

"On the contrary."

"You can work."

De Presle-Vaulx smiled: "I am afraid not! No De Presle-Vaulx has done a stroke of work in three hundred years."

"It's time, then"—Bulstrode was tart—"that you broke the record. Why don't you?" He said as though suddenly illumined—"make me your banker, draw on me for whatever sum you will, and since you have faith in her and are so well supported by the public opinion—bet on Grimace. I believe, with you, that he is sure to win. You would recoup much of your loss here."

De Presle-Vaulx pushed back his chair and exclaimed: "Monsieur!"

"Oh," shrugged Bulstrode, "a woman's caprice, my dear fellow! A foolish little whim of a girl! You can't be expected to mix sport and flirtation to the tune of two or three thousand dollars."

He smiled deceptively.

The young man laughed bitterly:

"So that is something of what you think of me? for I see you are not serious! It's a folly, of course, a sentimental folly," he met Bulstrode's eyes that silently accused him of a like—"but only a man in love knows what sentimental follies are worth! There is"—the young man was suddenly serious, "a sort of prodigality in love only understood by certain temperaments, certain races: it

may be degenerate: I suppose it is, and to push it quite to the last phase, is, of course, cowardly, certainly very weak, and men like you, Monsieur, will deem it so."

"You mean—?" and now Bulstrode's tone urged him to make himself clear.

"I mean," said De Presle-Vaulx firmly, "rather than renounce this woman I adore I will without doubt—(given the tangle in which the whole matter is!...) and he could not for the life of him put his intention into words. He smiled nevertheless unmistakably. Bulstrode leaned across the table and put his hand on the other's arm.

"Then you don't love her well enough not to break her heart? Or well enough to live a commonplace life for her?"

"I don't know how to do it."

"Well," said Bulstrode, "I have run upon quite a good many hard moments, perhaps some, in their way, as difficult as this, and I have never thought of getting out of the muddle. Perhaps it *is* a question, as you say, of temperament and race. I am inclined also to think, stubbornly, that it is a question of the quality of the love that one has for the woman. You won't think it impertinent of me, my dear friend,"—and his tone was such that no one could have thought it impertinent—"you won't, I am sure, take it amiss if we talk this over to-morrow, and if I try to show you something that means *life*, instead of what you plan."

"You know you as good as stood for De Presle-Vaulx."

Bulstrode held Mrs. Falconer's parasol, her fan, as well as a gold bag purse full of louis, a handkerchief and his own cane and field-glass. For the lady, standing on a chair the better to see the race-track, was applauding with enthusiasm the result of the first handicap. She had placed a bet on a horse called Plum-Branch "from a feeling of sentiment," as she said, because she had, that day, quite by chance, selected a hat with a decorative plum-branch amongst other garnitures.

"I am *standing*, certainly, Jimmy," she replied to his remark, "and to the peril of my high heels!— *There*, I've won! and won't you, like an angel, go and cash my bets?—give me the purse, you might have your hand picked! You can put my winnings in your pocket; they're not so enormous."

During his absence she watched the scene around her with animation. The spotless day, if one might so call it, when the sky and the turf and the whole world looked as though washed clean, and nature, seen in the warm sunlight, seemed to palpitate and flutter in the wind that gently stirred ends of ribbon or tips of plumes, and set the fragrance of the country air astir. Back of the lady the tribune was like a floral display: here and there a corner red as roses, there a mass of lily-white dresses enlivened by pink and blue parasols, and the green *pesage* stretched between the spectators and the race-track in bands of emerald, whilst across it promenaded or stood in groups those interested in the races. Mrs. Falconer acknowledged a friend here and there, glanced affectionately over to where Molly and the Marquis, seated near, fixed their attention on the race-course, where the winner, flying his blue ribbon, cantered triumphantly around the track.

One of a little group Falconer, the worse for many cocktails, stood by the railing, talking familiarly with his jockey, whilst Bon Jour, blanketed to the eyes, was being led up and down the outside track alongside of her rival, Rothschild's Grimace.

Bulstrode returning, gave his friend a handful of gold, which she put into her purse, and he repeated: "You remember that you stood, as it were, for De Presle-Vaulx?"

"I do," she said, "if you think the race-course is the place to take me to account for anything so serious, I do remember, and I do stand. What is the trouble that he needs me?"

"He needs," Bulstrode was serious, "a good many things, it seems to me, in order to get firmly on the plane where he should be!"

"And that is—?"

"On his feet, my dear friend."

"Well, he is head over heels in love," she nodded, "but when he finally lands I think you will find Maurice perfectly perpendicular."

"He won't," returned the other, "at all events, land in the bosom of his family."

"No?"—she looked away from the race-course and laughed—"you mean to say, Jimmy, has he heard, then?"

"I mean to say that *they* are quite clear in their minds about his marriage! They seem to have all the firmness that the young man lacks. Tell me," he asked his friend, "just what do you know

about the matter? What happened that you so strongly took up his cause with Molly? You have not told me yet."

She relinquished the interests of the moment to those of the sentimental question.

"It seems," she said, lowering her tone, "that they have been secretly engaged for a year. Nothing that an American girl can do would surprise me, but you can imagine that I was overwhelmed at his part in the matter. When Molly joined me in Fontainebleau, De Presle-Vaulx promptly followed, and I naturally obliged her to tell me everything. I was dismayed at the lack of *tendue* he had shown. I had a plain talk with him. He said that he had first met Molly at some dance or other in the American colony, I don't know where; that he understood that American girls disposed of their own lives; that he loved her and wanted to marry her, and that he was only waiting to gain the consent of his family before writing to her father. He seemed delighted to talk with me and perfectly conventional in his feelings. He further told me that his parents until now knew nothing, that he had not been able to tear himself away from Molly long enough to go down to the country where they were and see them. I forced him to write at once; exacted myself that until he received their answer there should be nothing between Molly and him but the merest distant acquaintance. I did not know that he had heard from the Marquise or his father. You seemed to have suddenly entirely gained his confidence and taken my place." She looked over at the young couple. "Poor Molly!" she exclaimed. "He has not, I should say, told her: she looks so happy and so serene! It's of course only a question of *dot*, otherwise there could be no possible objection. She is perfectly beautiful, the sweetest creature in the world; and she is a born Marquise!"

Bulstrode interrupted her impatiently:

"It would be more to the purpose if he were a born bread-winner and she were a dairy-maid!"

"Jimmy, how vulgar you are!"

"Very—" he was wonderfully sarcastic for him—"money is a very vulgar thing, my dear friend; it's as vulgar as air and bread and butter. It is like all other clean, decent vulgarity, it can be abused, but it's necessary to life."

Mrs. Falconer opened her eyes wide on this new Bulstrode.

"Why, what has happened to you?"

He made a comprehensive gesture: "Oh, I am always supporting a family!" he said with an amusing attempt at irritability. "I am always supporting a family that is not mine, that does not sit at my hearthstone or at my table. I am always marrying other people to some one else, and dressing other people's children!"

He finished with a laugh: "There, No. 5 is up! Aren't you interested in this race?"

Mrs. Falconer and Bulstrode had walked a little from where the young couple chattered indifferent to everything but each other.

"No; I am only interested in what you are saying. What have you planned to do or thought out for them, Jimmy? What do your rebellious phrases imply? *Are* you really going to make a home for—?"

Bulstrode said stubbornly. "No! I am going to show him how to make one for himself."

He stopped short where he stood: he had resumed the care of her parasol, her fan, and purse.

Her face, as she took in his exposition of his plan for the regeneration of a decayed nobility, was inscrutable. Instead of exclaiming, she stopped to speak a moment to some people who passed, shook hands with the owner of the favorite, and when they were once again alone said to her friend:

"Isn't it too delightful! the whole scene? I mean to say, how perfectly they do it all. How thoroughly gay it is, how debonnair, graceful, and *bien compris*. Look at the wonderful color of the *pesage*, and the life of the whole thing! These Latin most thoroughly understand the art of living. You scarcely ever see a care-worn face in France. Look at Jack now! Did you ever see such anxiety as he represents? If Bon Jour is beaten I don't know *what* will become of him. What shall I do with him?"

Bulstrode's interest on this subject was tepid.

"Oh, he'll be all right!" he said indifferently. "Take him to the Dublin Horse Fair."

And then as though she had not capriciously left the other topic, Mrs. Falconer asked:

"Just what *is* your plan for Molly and her Marquis? May I not know?"

And Bulstrode who had never in any way thought out a plan or scheduled a scheme for the wise distribution of the good he intended to do, educated now, so he fondly hoped, by his failures,

wiser, he was proud to believe, by several sharp lessons—with no little confidence and something of pride, said to his companion:

"I have a ranch out West, you know; a little property I took for a bad debt once. It has turned out to be a great and good piece of luck. That time I was fortunate—" (his tone, was congratulatory and Mrs. Falconer smiled prettily). "I now need a second overseer again—a man of brains, good temper, and physical endurance, who can keep accounts. Experience isn't at all necessary. There's my Englishman there, my Christmas tramp, you recall; he'll show De Presle-Vaulx his duties. It's a good enough berth for any determined chap who has his way to make and an ideal to work for. I purpose to send this Frenchman out on a salary and to see what stuff he's made of. After a year or two, with good sense and push, he will be in a position to ask any girl to be his wife. I'll raise his salary, and if Molly is the girl I take her for, she will help him there."

"And his family, Jimmy?"

"Damn his family!" risked the aroused Bulstrode.

Mrs. Falconer laughed.

"Really! It is casual of you! but you don't know them and can't! But they can quite spoil the whole thing as far as Molly is concerned. His tradition and race, his home and all it means to him—why you can't roughly run against all the old conventions like that, my dear man!"

"Well," said the ruthless gentleman, "then he can go and feed on their charity, can take to his flesh-pots and give up the girl. She is far too good for any foreign fortune-hunter anyway. You spoil a man, all of you. You'd prefer a disreputable roué to a cowboy with money in his pocket and a heart."

"Would it then prove to you De Presle-Vaulx's heart if he threw over his family and went West?"

"Yes," said the other quickly. "It would prove he loves the girl."

"You forget his mother."

Bulstrode fumed.

"I have not the honor to forget her; I don't know the Marquise de Presle-Vaulx."

"I do," interrupted his friend. "She is a charming, gentle old dear; narrow, if you call it so, clear-headed and delightful. She adores her only son, and thinks quite properly that his name, his estates, beautiful if mortgaged, are a fair exchange for an American *dot*. Maurice de Presle-Vaulx, after all, does not go poverty-stricken to the woman he marries. There are not so many ways to live after one is twenty-five, and to uproot this scion of an old race, to exact such a sacrifice——"

"It would make a man of him."

"He is one already. There are all kinds, I need not tell you so."

"He is head over heels in debt."

Mrs. Falconer laughed again.

"We make him out an acrobat between us."

"He gambles on borrowed money."

"You mean that you have forced him to borrow from you? He will pay what he owes, I am sure of him."

Bulstrode wheeled and scrutinized her, and said with the natural asperity of a man who is bored by a woman's too generous championship of another man:

"You stand for him warmly."

Mrs. Falconer, reading him, said quickly:

"Oh, I know him thoroughly! He has the faults of his race, but as an individual he is the right sort."

With their pretty habit, her cheeks had grown red in the course of the discussion.

"Please give me my parasol; it's awfully hot here."

He opened it for her and she held its rosy lining against the sun.

Mr. Falconer, who from the rail had been observing, through the haze formed by countless cocktails, the figure of his wife in her white dress, as well as the figure of her faithful squire, here

came swaggering up to them both. He was never jealous, but Mr. Bulstrode's uniform courtesy and attention to the woman neglected by her husband often piqued him to attention. As he drew near, Mrs. Falconer asked quickly:

"And the Marquis, Jimmy? What do you suppose he will say to your Wild West scheme?"

Bulstrode smiled.

"Oh, you women understand us even when we are stupid mysteries to ourselves! Tell me, how will he take this?"

"He will refuse." The lady was quick in her decision. "He cannot in consistence do otherwise. He will consider your plan provincial and Yankee, and he will consider, what you ignore, that it will kill his mother. If he cannot marry Molly with the family consent in proper French fashion he will naturally give her up. But first of all, my dear Jimmy, he will put *you* in your place!"

Bulstrode cast a fatherly glance to where the young people sat talking together: the Marquis in gray clothes of the latest London make, a white rose in his button-hole, and monocle in his eye, a figure more unlike the traditional cowboy one could scarcely conceive.

"Your taste is good, ma chere amie," his voice was delighted. "Your instinct as a connoisseur is faultless; but you are not quite sure of your *objet d'art* this time." He nodded kindly at the Parisian—"He's all right! he's a true sport, a lover and a man. De Presle-Vaulx knows my Wild West scheme and has accepted."

Molly had put twenty-five francs on Bon Jour and expected to win it. The money Bulstrode played would have bought a very handsome present for his lady, and he felt as if he were making an anonymous gift to the woman he loved.

At the ringing of the bell Falconer left his post by the railing and came up and joined the little group of his friends just below the Grand Stand. He lit a cigar, threw down the match furiously, smoked furiously, and nerved himself for the strain.

Nodding toward the betting contingent he muttered: "They're sheep. They're all betting on the favorite naturally. Bon Jour wasn't mentioned for place even, poor little girl!"

The ignored little racer had ambled around the field, her jockey in crimson and white, doubled up upon her back after the manner of his profession. Bon Jour was as golden red as a young chestnut; she had four white feet that twinkled on the fragrant turf whose odors of crushed blades and green blades, of earth and the distant smell of the sea went to her pretty head. She threw it up eagerly as her disputants filled the field. There were nine horses scheduled, but only five qualified. The Rothschild gelding, an English gray, and two others named for probable places.

"She's cool as a rose," murmured Bon Jour's owner, "and just look at her form, will you!"

It was charming, and already the American's horse was attracting attention.

Molly, with De Presle-Vaulx's aid, rose on her chair, from which her excitement threatened at any moment to precipitate her.

"Oh, Maurice—of course she'll win. Isn't she a *dear*? How much shall I make on twenty-five francs?"

Bulstrode smiled.

"A frightful amount! There are twenty to one up on her, Molly."

The girl mentally calculated, exclaimed with pleasure and, with sparkling eyes, watched the lining-up of the racers. Neck to neck they stood, a splendid showing of satin and shine from fetlock to forelock, equine beauty enough to gladden a sporting man's heart, and all five were away before Miss Malines was even sure which one was the great Grimace.

From the first the favorite's nose was to the good. His shapely body followed, and when the horses came in sight again beyond the right-hand hedge, he had put four lengths between himself and the others. The winner of the Grand Prix had all the field with him. But the gray gelding who strained at Grimace's flanks had no staying powers, although he was backed as strongly for place as was Grimace to win; as he fell back Bon Jour began to attract notice.

Bulstrode and De Presle-Vaulx exchanged glances over the absorbed figure of Jack Falconer. "She may yet win place," murmured the younger man.

As they came up the wide turf sweep that lay like an emerald sea crested by the dark waves of the hedges, as the horses rocked like ships over the obstacle—Bon Jour closely followed the favorite.

At the moment Miss Malines cried: "Oh, a jockey's off! Oh, Jack, it's Bon Jour! She's *thrown* her jockey! I see the red and white."

But Falconer biting his cigar fiercely, laughed in scorn. "She's thrown *them* all right. She's left them all *behind* her—see!" he pointed, "there are only three running." And, indeed, as they came again in sight, one of the horses was seen to be wandering loose about the course, and another cantered nonchalantly some hundred yards behind.

"She's not even trying," murmured her enchanted owner. "She's cool as a rose."

The cries which had named the Rothschild gelding from the start were now mingled, and Bon Jour, flying around the emerald course, might have heard her name for the first on the public lips. She was running gracefully, her head even with the favorite's saddle and the English gray was a far-off third. Bon Jour was pressing to fame.

At the last hurdle as they appeared flying in full sight of the Grand Stand it was evident the pretty creature had made her better good. The horses leapt simultaneously and came down on all fours, with Grimace to the rear, and amongst the frantic acclamation with which the public is always ready to greet the surprise of unlooked-for merit, Bon Jour passed Grimace by half a metre at the goal. Jack Falconer was an interesting figure on the turf; his horse was worth twenty thousand pounds.

Several hours later, Bulstrode, early in the salon, walked up and down waiting the arrival of the ladies. He had paid downstairs a hundred francs for the privilege of dining in the window of the restaurant, because Mrs. Falconer chanced to remark that one saw the room better from that point. And the head waiter even after this monstrous tip said if "*ces dames*" were late there would be no possibility to keep this gilt-edged table for them. It was the night of the year at Trouville: Boldi and his Hungarians played to five hundred people in the dining-room.

Bulstrode looked at the clock; they had yet ten minutes' grace.

Extremely satisfied with himself, with Bon Jour, above all with the French Marquis—he felt a glow of affection for the whole French nation.

"How we misjudge them!" he mused; "how we accuse them of clinging to their families' apron strings, of being bad colonists; call them hearthstone huggers, degenerates; and declare that they lack nerve and force to rescue themselves from degeneration! And here without hesitation this young man——" At this moment the salon door opened, and one of the ladies he had been expecting came in, the youngest one, Miss Molly Malines, in a tulle dress, an enormous white hat, a light scarf over her shoulders, and the remains of recent tears on her face.

"Oh, Mr. Bulstrode!" she exclaimed, half putting out her hand and drawing it back again, as she bit her lips: "I thought I should find Mary here; I wanted to see her first to *cry* with! but of course it is you I *should* see and not cry with!"

She gave a little gasp and put her handkerchief to her eyes to his consternation; then to his relief controlled herself.

"Maurice has just told me *everything*," she repeated the word with much the same desperation that De Presle-Vaulx had put into a gesture which to Bulstrode had signified ruin.

"He's too wonderful! too *glorious*, Mr. Bulstrode, isn't he? I loved him before, but I *adore* him now! He's glorious. I never heard anything so terrible and so silly!"

Bright tears sprang to brighter eyes, and she dashed them away.

("She's adorable") he was obliged to acknowledge it.

"Why, how could you be so cruel; yes, I will say it, so cruel, so hard, so brutal?"

"*Brutal?*"—he fairly whispered the word in his surprise.

"Why, fancy Maurice in the West, in the dreadful Western life, in that climate——!"

"Why, it is the Garden of Eden," murmured Bulstrode.

"Oh, I mean to say with cattle and cowboys."

"Come," interrupted her father's friend, practically, "you don't know what you are talking about, Molly. You don't talk like an American girl. They've spoiled De Presle-Vaulx, and this will make a man of him!"

Miss Malines called out in scorn:

"*A man of him!* What do you think he is? He's the finest man I ever saw. You don't know him. Just because he has a title and his mother spoils him, and because he has been a little reckless in

debts and things, you throw him over as you do all the French race without knowing them!"

Her tears had dried and her cheeks flamed.

"Why, Maurice has served three years as a common soldier in the Madagascar Army; and *that's* no cinch! Cuba's a joke to it. He's had the fever and marched with it. He's slept all night with no covering but the clothes he had worn for weeks. He's eaten bread and drunk dirty water. He's been a soldier three years. The way I came to know him was at Dinard where he swam out into the sea to save a fisherman who couldn't swim, and all the town was out in the storm to welcome him! They carried him up the streets in their arms—" she waited a minute to steady her voice—"He's been two years exploring in Abyssinia with a native caravan—no white man near him, he's the youngest man wearing the Legion d'Honneur in France. *And you want to send him out to make a cowboy of him in the American West to turn him into a man!*"

Mr. Bulstrode had never heard such impressive youthful scorn. Molly threw back her pretty head and laughed.

"Do you know many cowboys who have been three years a soldier; travelled through unexplored countries; written a book that was crowned by an academy? Well, I don't!" she said boldly. "Of course I like his title, of course I am proud of his traditions. They're fine! And it is no dishonor to love his château and his Paris hôtel, and I'd love his mother, too—if she'd let me. But I adore Maurice *as he is*, and he's man enough for me!"

The floor seemed to quiver under poor Bulstrode, who could scarcely see distinctly the lovely excited face as he ventured timidly:

"I didn't know all these things, Molly."

She was still unpitiful.

"Of course not! Americans never do know. They only *judge*. You didn't think Maurice would tell you all his good points! He doesn't think they are anything. He only sees the fact that he has debts and that we are both poor and his family won't give their consent."

Mr. Bulstrode smiled and said:

"He is naturally forced to see these things, my dear child."

The girl softened at his tone and said more gently:

"Well, they are terrible facts, of course. It only means that my heart is broken, but it doesn't mean that I will consent to your plan, or to his plan, Mr. Bulstrode. I won't make him break his mother's heart and ruin his career for me."

The gentleman came up and took her hands: his voice was very gentle:

"What, then, will you do?"

"Oh, wait," she said with less spirit. "Wait until his mother consents, or until she dies...." She began to hang her head. Her eulogy of her lover over, only the dry facts of the present remained. She had no more enthusiasm with which to animate her voice.

Here Mrs. Falconer and the Marquis opened the door, and started back as the animated picture of beauty being consoled by kindness met their view.

"Oh, come along in!" cried the girl cheerily. "I have just been ballyragging Mr. Bulstrode!"

De Presle-Vaulx came eagerly forward:

"Don't listen to her, Monsieur! Molly's tired out after so much success."

The startled benefactor looked doubtfully from her to the young man.

"And you?"

"Oh, I?" shrugged De Presle-Vaulx, "I'm already half cowboy!"

Mary Falconer put her arm round Molly's waist, drew her to her, "and Molly is more than half Marquise."

"Mr. Bulstrode," again cried the girl impetuously. "*Please* reason with him! He's horribly obstinate. You have put this dreadful idea in his head; now please tell him how *ridiculous* it is. If he goes West and spoils his career and breaks with his family, I'll never marry him! As it is, I will wait for ever!"

"But my dear child!" Mary Falconer was determined to have the whole thing out before them, "you don't seem to get it into your head that you have neither of you a sou, and Maurice can never earn any money in France."

Miss Malines, to whom money meant that she drew on her father, the extravagant stockbroker whose seat even in the Stock Exchange was mortgaged, and who had not ten thousand dollars' capital in the world—lost countenance here at the cruel and vulgar introduction of the commodity on which life turns. She sighed, her lips trembled, and she capitulated:

"Oh, if that's really true ... as I suppose it is——"

Bulstrode watched her, she had grown pale—she drew a deep breath, and, looking up, not at her lover, but at the elder man, said softly:

"Why, I guess I'll have to give him quite up then."

But here De Presle-Vaulx made an exclamation, and before them all took Molly in his arms:

"No," he said tenderly, "never, never! *That* the last of all! Mr. Bulstrode is right. I must work for you, and I will. We'll both go West together. Couldn't you? Wouldn't you come with me?"

... "And your mother?" asked the girl.

"Nothing—" De Presle-Vaulx whispered, "nothing, counts but *you*."

Over their heads Bulstrode met his friend's eye, and in his were—he could not help it—triumph, keen delight, and in hers there was anger at him and tears.

At this moment the waiter put his head in at the door and implored Monsieur to come down if he wanted the seat in the window.

"Oh, we're coming!" Mrs. Falconer cried impatiently. "Molly, there's some eau-de-cologne on the table. Put it on your eyes. Don't be long or we'll lose our place. The West will keep!"

She went out of the door and Bulstrode followed her. In the hall she said tartly:

"Well, I hope you're satisfied! I never saw a more perfect inquisitor. Why didn't you live at the time of the Spanish persecution?"

He ignored her scathing question:

"I am satisfied," he said happily, "with both of them; they're bricks."

The lady made no reply as she rustled along by his side to the elevator.

From the floors below came the clear, bright sound of the Hungarian music in an American cake-walk and the odor of cigars and wines and the distinct suggestion of good things to eat came tempting their nostrils.

As Bulstrode followed the brilliant woman, a sense of defeat came over him and with less conviction he repeated:

"I *am* satisfied, but you, my friend, are not."

"Oh," shrugged Mary Falconer desperately, "you know *I've* no right to think, or feel, or criticise! I never pretend to run people's lives or to act the benefactor or to take the place of Fate."

The light danced and sparkled on the jet in her black dress, on the jewels on her neck. Under her black feather-hat her face, brilliant and glowing, seemed for once to be defiant to him, her handsome eyes were dark with displeasure.

The poor fellow could never recall having caused a cloud to ruffle her face before in his life. It was not like her. Her tenderness for a second had gone. He could not live without that, he knew it, what ever else he must forego.

He said, with some sadness, "I suppose you're right: if one can buy even a *honeymoon* for another couple he shouldn't lose the opportunity."

She looked up at him quickly. They had reached the ground floor—they had left the elevator and they stood side by side in the hall. The lady had a very trifle softened, not very much, still he noticed the change and was duly grateful.

"We must wait here," she said, "for the others to come down. I can't let Molly go in alone, and I don't know where my husband is; I haven't seen him all day."

Bulstrode continued spiritlessly: "Molly, if you remember, begged me to tell De Presle-Vaulx how 'perfectly ridiculous' my scheme for the Wild West is. I will tell him this—you will coach me, —there'll be some pleasure in that, at least! and then I'll find out for what sum the Marquise de Presle-Vaulx will sell her son. I'll buy him," he said, "for Molly, and of course," he brought it out quite simply, "I shall *dot* the girl."

And then the lady stepped back and looked at him. He felt, before that she had merely swept

him with her eyes; now she looked at him. She cried his name out—"Jimmy!"—that was all.

But in the exclamation, in the change of her mobile face, in the lovely gesture that her hand made, as if it would have gone to his, Bulstrode was forced to feel himself eminently, gloriously repaid, and it is not too much to say that he did.

THE FIFTH ADVENTURE

V

IN WHICH HE MAKES NOBODY HAPPY AT ALL

Bulstrode stood before the entrance of the Hôtel de Paris bidding his friends good-night. Watching them, at least one of them, enter in under the shelter of the glass pavilion, he considered how much more lonely he was at that special moment than he could remember having been before. Of course he had bidden Mary Falconer good-night a hundred dozen times in the course of his life, but it seemed to come with a more sublime significance than ever how he gave her up every time he said good-by and how he was himself left alone. And yet, had Mrs. Falconer been asked, she would have said that she never found her friend more cold and more constrained. In his correct evening dress with the flower she herself had given him in his buttonhole, his panama in his hand, he had been absorbed in her beauty, in the grace of her dark dress, bright with scintillating ornaments—her big feathered hat under which her face was more lovely, more alluring than ever; and nothing in his eyes told the woman what he thought and felt.

She touched his arm, saying:

"Look, Jimmy."

"Isn't that the lovely woman we've so often remarked? See, she's all alone, how curious! She's going over to the Casino to play, I suppose. *What* can have happened to the man who has been with her all this time? Where is the Prince Pollona?"

As Bulstrode turned his head in the direction indicated, through the trees passed along the figure of a slender woman, trailing her thin gown over the pebbles and the grass. She disappeared in the lighted doorway of the Casino.

"You're quite bearish to-night," Mrs. Falconer said reproachfully, "quite a bear. I believe you're angry! Dear Jimmy, you may, I promise, carry out all your philanthropies without my interference; I won't even criticise or tease. I promise you next time you shall go sweetly and serenely on your foolish way!"

"Oh," he got out with effort, "I believe I've suddenly grown awfully selfish, for I find I'm so ridiculous as only to want things for myself——"

(When he stopped she did not help him but, instead, persisted gently with the wicked feminine way she had of urging him, tempting him on.)

"What, then, what do you wish? Can't you tell me?"

He laughed almost roughly and said, "No, it's a secret, and I'm one of those unusual creatures who can keep a secret."

The woman's face changed. He saw the shadow that crossed it. "Come," she sighed, "you must bid me good-night..."

And at this moment he had seen Jack Falconer emerge from a still more shadowy corner, a cigar between his teeth. Drawing his wife's arm through his, Falconer nodded to the other man and said they had all better be going up. Bulstrode noted bitterly the satisfaction on Falconer's bestial, indulgent face and the content that man felt with himself this evening, his triumph at the race's termination. His horse had won the stakes and was famous, his wife had been called to-day the loveliest woman in Trouville, and not for the first time Bulstrode suffered from it, the proprietorship with which Falconer considered his wife. For the smallest part of a second he fancied that the woman drew away, half turned away, looked toward him; and in dread that he might, if he met her eyes, see some look like appeal, Bulstrode avoided meeting her glance. He saw them pass under the glass roof of the hôtel leaving him standing alone.

The deserted lover waited until they had disappeared; then, turning abruptly, vaguely in

search of human beings with whom he might exchange a word should he feel inclined to talk, dreading the deserted gardens and finding his own rooms the dreariest prospect of all, he went into the Casino with the intention of waiting for the Frenchman who he thought more than likely would come and join him there. The Marquis failing him, Bulstrode chose a place not far from the table where the lovely woman, that Mrs. Falconer and himself had remarked, seated herself before the game.

Bulstrode's sense of desolation and loneliness would not leave him. If his luck had been bad, the excitement of the sport might have brought him some sensation; but, on the contrary, he won. "Only," he said humorously, as he gathered up his winnings, "only unlucky in love!"

It was well on in the night when he thrust his last roll of bank notes into his pocket. He had beaten the bank; he had raked up and stuffed away a small fortune. As he wandered out through the deserted rooms, he noted, bent over the table, her head in her hand, the woman who, in spite of his sincere absorption in Mary Falconer, had, like a temptation, crossed his mind when he first came into the Casino. No one disturbed her, and she had remained in this dejected posture for some time. This one amongst the many women in Trouville, Bulstrode and his friends had remarked for several days. She had first appeared alone; made a discreet *début* on the beach, passed through the Rue de Paris and kept away from the more public parts of the town. Later she had been joined by a man well known in the world, the Prince Pollona, who was travelling incognito. The woman's beauty and manner were such that her actual standing was a mooted question; it had even been remarked that she was the princess herself incognita, but that they all knew to be impossible.

Before the official who waited to see the last players leave the *salle* could speak to her, she rose of her own accord, gathering her silken cloak about her, and went quickly from the gambling room. Once on the stairway, however, her footsteps halted and she went slowly down as if reluctant to leave the shelter of the brightly lighted apartments. Bulstrode following her, observed her closely; tall, very slender, with a fine carriage and a lovely blonde head set on the most graceful of necks, older than Molly and younger than Mrs. Falconer, she was quite as *comme il faut*. All along she had worn a collar and rope of pearls which had excited Molly's enthusiasm. To-night she was denuded of her jewels; her neck was bare. Bulstrode remarked this as he walked behind in full view of the soft adorable *nuque* below the curls of the girl's fair hair. She trailed her dress slowly through the garden walks, her white figure in the darkness escaping from him a little as the trees made an avenue for her. But Bulstrode distinctly felt that he was expected to follow. Whether or not he might intrude he did not ask, as he came along, surprised however to see her actually stop short within a few feet of him. Under the full light of one of the big lamps, she stood motionless, her arms by her side, her chin raised. Now that he was quite near her he found her more lovely than he had even imagined.

He went up directly to her and, without asking how she might take his interference, said: "You cannot remain here alone, Madame, the gardens are deserted. What can I do for you?"

As he so spoke in his kind voice the woman lifted her head and looked full at him; Bulstrode was surprised at her words and more particularly at her voice.

"You—" she breathed, "you?"

Taking it for granted that for some reason or other it might be him more than any other man, Bulstrode went on. "You seem more or less to be in trouble, if I may say so. Won't you please let me be of some service to you—let me at least see you out of these gloomy gardens?"

But the woman, whose face had flushed, exclaimed: "Oh, no, no! Please don't bother; please leave me. I want to be alone." And, as she spoke, she turned and went away from him some few steps.

Jimmy Bulstrode never knew what impulse made him spring forward and with one sudden gesture dash from her hand what it held. But the little object fell some distance away, hard down in the grass, to be found the next morning by the guardians of the place and considered as a relic of the fortunes of Casino hazard.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the gentleman, and he caught in his hand the slender wrist from which he had just dashed the weapon. "My good God! You poor child, why, why—" and he could go no further. The woman's face, although moved, was singularly tranquil for the face of a woman on the verge of self-destruction.

"Won't you leave me," she whispered and Bulstrode, gathering himself together, said firmly:

"Leave you? Not now, certainly, not for anything in the world. And you must let me take you home."

After a few moments' silence in which she bit her lip and apparently controlled a burst of hysterical weeping, the young woman accepted his offer and very lightly put her hand on his arm. "You may, if you like," she consented, "take me home, as you call it. I am staying at the Hôtel des Roches Noires."

From the Casino gardens through the silent town without exchanging one word with her—for

he saw she wished to be silent—Jimmy took the lady, as he called it, home. Once in the big corridor of the vast hôtel, into whose impersonal shelter they entered as the only late comers, he stood for a second before bidding her good-night, whilst the porter eyed them, scarcely with curiosity, so used was he to late entrances of this kind which he imagined he fully understood.

"Good-night—" Bulstrode started and at once cut himself short, for he did not really intend to say it then—he had not spoken to her and he knew he would never leave her until at least he was sure she would not take her life before the next morning.

The girl extended her hand, her beautiful face was gray. "Will you not," she asked, "come up with me to my drawing-room? I am quite alone."

Bulstrode bowed and without hesitation followed her up the stairs to the conventional suite of hôtel rooms, where, in the little salon, trunks stood about in the evident indications of hasty packing.

The girl threw her gloves, her handkerchief and her soft silken cloak on the table. She then seated herself in a corner of the sofa by an open dressing-bag and Bulstrode, at her invitation, took a chair opposite. He scarcely knew how to begin his conversation with her, but he determined at once to go toward what he believed to be the most crying need.

"You lost to-night," he said. "I saw it. As it happened, I was lucky. I have no need of money, none." He had drawn from his pocket piles of louis; he took out from his wallet a roll of notes.

He saw, too, as well as the look of passion and admiration, that her face was familiar, at least that there was about it something that suggested remembrance.

"This," she said, "is a fortune!" Her accent was British and her voice very soft and sweet. "It is quite a large fortune, isn't it? My debts here are small. I have not fifty pounds in the world," she said smiling, "I work for my living, too. I have been extravagant, for I had really made a lot of money, but lately I've thrown everything away. Yesterday my pearls were sold, and my jewels went last week; the races and the Casino did the rest! This would make me quite rich."

"Work for her living!" Bulstrode thought, with a pang as he looked at her. "Heavens, poor dear!" A thousand questions came to his lips, but he asked her none. He was mastering the feelings her personality, her trouble, and the night, aroused. He also decided to go at once, while there was still time.

"It is very droll that this money should have come from *you*," she repeated "from you," with the insistence on the pronoun that he had before remarked as strange. "Even now you don't know me, do you? Don't you know who I am?"

"No," Bulstrode wondered, "and yet I have certainly seen you before, but save as I have noticed and admired you here, I don't *think* I know you. Should I?"

"You *have* seen me then here?" she caught delighted, "you have actually noticed me? You said 'admire'; did you perhaps find something in me to like?"

"Who," he said with sincerity, "could help himself! Of course I've seen you and remarked you with your friend."

Here she bit her lip and put up her hand. "Oh, please," she frowned, "Oh, please!"

Bulstrode, surprised at her accents of distress, murmured an excuse and said he was much at fault, he should remember. But here the girl smiled. "Well, it is not exactly a duty to know me; my name is not quite unknown. I play in 'The Shining Lights Company,' 'The Warren Company,' I am Felicia Warren—*now*, haven't you seen me play!"

He was sorry, very, very sorry that he had not! Oh, but he knew her name and her success; they were famous. He wished he could have assured her that he had admired her before the footlights ...!

Felicia Warren's eyes strayed down at the table on which the money was so alluringly spread.

"I've been touring in Australia and the Colonies, still I go now and then to the Continent, though I am almost always in London." She paused, then regarded him fully with her great blue eyes. "Don't you remember, Mr. Bulstrode, a great many years ago when you took a shooting-box in Gloucestershire? Don't you remember...?"

Staring at her, trying to place the image which was now taking form, he did; he *did* remember it and she?

"There was a mill there on the place. Rugby Doan was the miller, he is the miller still." Didn't Mr. Bulstrode remember that Doan had a daughter? She had been fifteen years old then, she had ambitions, she was altogether a ridiculous and silly little thing; didn't he remember?

Bulstrode was silent.

The gentleman, Mr. Bulstrode, took a strong liking to Doan; he gave him the money to educate his daughter. Oh, dear me, such a generous lot of money! Then, as the girl was extraordinarily silly (she had ambitions) she went on the stage. Her father never forgave her; poor father! She had never seen him since. "Mr. Bulstrode, don't you remember Felicia Doan?—I am the miller's daughter."

Bulstrode extended his hand. He wanted to say: "My poor child, my poor little girl," but Miss Warren's dignity forbade it. "No wonder your face was familiar," he said quietly; "no wonder! How I wish I might have seen you play, but we must do something to make your father look at things in a reasonable way. What can we do?"

The girl shook her head. "Nothing" she said absently, "oh, nothing. You know what an English yeoman is! or perhaps you don't! My greatest kindness is to keep away from the Mill on the Rose" ...

But Felicia Warren was not thinking of Glouceshire or of her father. Still looking down at the money on the table, not even toward her newly-found friend, she went on, "It is not half as curious, our meeting here, as one might think. I knew you were here when I came and I have watched you every day with—with your friend." A slight expression of amusement crossed her face as, looking up, she caught his puzzled expression. "Ah, you wonder about it!" she laughed gently. Coming a little nearer to him, she went on: "You see, you have been my benefactor, haven't you?"

(Bulstrode wondered in just how far he *had* been beneficent!) "It's natural I should remember you with gratitude, isn't it? Thanks to you I have made my name." Her pride was touching. "You've made it possible for me to know the world, to know life and to realize my career. And now," she emphasized, "you've come to save my life and afterward give me a little fortune." Here she again pointed to the money. "My father took your money for years, Mr. Bulstrode, but *this*, *this* must all go back. You must take it back soon—not that it could really tempt me, but it hurts me to see it there."

Bulstrode, more wretched than he had yet been in his philanthropic failures stared at her helplessly. This blind beneficence, this gift made to the miller in a moment of enthusiasm had produced—how could he otherwise believe—fatal results? Here was this delicate creature in the fastest place in Europe, deserted by a man who had brought her here—on the verge of suicide.

Whilst speaking, Felicia Warren gathered up the gold and notes and she was thrusting the money into his hand.

"Please, please be reasonable," he pleaded. "You must let me help you. There isn't any question of delicacy in the situation where you find yourself to-night. If ever a man should be a woman's friend, I should be that friend to you, and you must let me. Don't refuse. Money is such a little thing, such a stupid little thing."

Miss Warren shook her head obstinately. "Oh, that depends! I've worked so hard that money often seems to me everything. Indeed, I thought so to-night when I had not a sou! I shall think so to-morrow when they seize my trunks for the hôtel bill."

"Seize your trunks!" he exclaimed. "Why—you don't mean to say—?"

The actress blushed crimson. "Oh, of course you thought otherwise," she said, throwing up her pretty head. "I pay for my own livelihood, Mr. Bulstrode," she told him proudly, "I pay for *everything* I have and wear and eat and do. Don't feel badly at misunderstanding," she comforted him sweetly—"You have nothing to apologize for. Why should you or anyone think otherwise? But I don't care in the least what people say or think; that is, *I only care what one person says.*"

With some of his gold in her palm and some of his bills in her hands, Felicia Warren put both her hands on Bulstrode's arm. "No," she said softly, "*I only care what one person thinks.* Can't you see that you mustn't give me this?"

"No," he persisted doggedly, charmed by her beyond his reason and angry to find that she would not let him help her in the way he wished, "I do *not* see! You must let me help you, you shall not be driven to desperation."

"Driven to desperation!" her expression seemed to say. Yes, so she had been, but not through financial anxieties.

"Why, I had rather starve than take your money. I could far sooner have taken it from poor Pollona; and he left me so dreadfully angry this morning."

For a second neither spoke. He saw the soft mobile face touched to its finest. Felicia's eyes were violet and large, and their expression at the moment pierced him with its appeal.

"Don't you see?" she whispered. Her voice broke here. Her hands trembled on his arm, some of the gold rattled on the floor and rolled under the divan. She swayed and Bulstrode caught her.

"... Ever since you came to the mill," she whispered, "ever—since—you—came—to—the—"

mill."

Before Bulstrode had time to realize what she said, or the fact that his arm was about her, she had rushed across the room, thrown open the window and gone out on the balcony. Left alone with what her words implied, Bulstrode watched her go.

The clock on the mantel pointed to three and through the open window came the long, rushing sound of the sea on the beach. The day was breaking and Bulstrode could see the white figure of Felicia Warren between the lighted room and the dawn.

He told himself that there was no reason why he should look upon her as anything but an adventuress—and a very clever one—a very dangerous one. But, at all events, there was no doubt that she was Felicia Doan. She refused his money, and she told him that she loved him. But Jimmy Bulstrode, man of the world as he was, did not reason at all along those lines. Whether because he was vain, as most men are, or because he was susceptible as he always told himself he was, he believed what she said. More than once during the week at Trouville, when she should have been absorbed in Polonna, Bulstrode had caught her eyes fastened upon himself and as soon as she had met his own she had turned hers away. He had no difficulty now in recalling the Mill on the Rose, or the lovely bit of country where his shooting-box had held him captive for nearly the whole hunting season. Nor had he any difficulty in recalling the miller and his pretty daughter. Felicia even then had been a wonder of good looks, and very intelligent and mature. He could even see her as a child more plainly than he could recall the woman who had just left him. She had been a pretty, romantic girl and—she had deeply charmed him. He had walked with her under the willows; he had told her many things; he had gone boating with her on the Rose; he had tramped with her along the English lanes. Of course he had been wrong. He had known it at the time—he had known it. And perhaps one reason why he never reverted willingly to the days spent with the girl was because his conscience had not left him free. The money given to Doan, Bulstrode had always felt, was a sort of recompense for hours of pleasure to which he had no right. Even at the time he had feared that he had disturbed the girl's peace, and because he had not wished to disturb his own, he had given up his lease and left the place. Twelve years! Well, they had altered her enormously, and her life had altered her and her experiences, and she was a very charming creature. She was, in a measure, his very own work—almost his creation. He had helped her to change her station, to alter her life. What had she become?

Bulstrode's reflections consumed twenty minutes by the clock. He had smoked a cigarette and walked up and down the deserted room, passing many times the table where his gold lay scattered.

Finally—he did not dare to trust himself to go out to her—he called her name, Felicia Warren's name, gently, and she came directly in.

Whilst alone on the balcony she had wept. Bulstrode could see the trace on her cheeks and she was paler even than when he had struck the pistol from her hand in the gardens of the Casino. She came over to where he stood and said:

"It's not a ruse, Mr. Bulstrode. Girls like me always have ideals. It is fame with some, money with others, dress and a social craze for a lot of them. But with me, ever since you came it has been YOU—everything you said to me twelve years ago I have remembered. Silly as it seems, I could almost tell the very words. I have seen a lot of men since, too many," she said, "and known them too well. But I have never seen anybody like you."

Bulstrode tried to stop her.

"But no," she pleaded, "let me go on. I've dreamed I might grow great, and that some day you would see me play and that I should play so well that you would go crazy about me! I have thought this really, and I have lived for it, really—until—until—"

As he did not question her or interrupt, she went on:

"I said it was an ideal. Thinking of you and what I'd like to grow for you kept me, in spite of everything—and I fancy you know in my profession what that means—good."

Here Felicia Warren met his eyes frankly with the same look of entire innocence with which she might have met his eyes under the willows near her father's mill.

"I've been so horribly afraid that when you *did* come there might be heaps of things you would not like that I have been awfully hard on myself, awfully!"

She was lacing and unlacing her slender fingers as she talked.

"I went to Paris this spring because I saw that you were there, and after passing you several times in the Bois and seeing that as far as I could judge you were just the same as you had been, I took a new courage hoping, waiting, for you, and being the best I knew. It seems awfully queer to hear a woman talk like this to a man," she understood it herself—"but you see I am used to speaking in public and I suppose it is easier for me than for most women."

Bulstrode, more eager than anything else to know what her life had really been, surprised

and incredulous at everything she said, broke in here:

"But this—this man?"

"Oh, Pollona," she replied, "has been there for years, for years. He has loved me ever since I first made my *début* and he follows me everywhere like a dog. I have never looked at any of them, until this week."

With a sigh as if she renounced all her dreams, she said: "I grew tired of my romantic folly. I was ill and nervous and could not play any more, and that was dreadful. So, when Pollona came to me in Paris this spring, I gave him a sort of promise. I told him that I was going to Trouville for the Grande Semaine, that I would think things over and that I would send him word."

She picked up her handkerchief from the table where it lay beside her gloves and her cloak and twisted the delicate object in her hands, whose whiteness and transparency Bulstrode remarked. They were clever hands, and showed her temperament and showed also singular breeding for one born in the state of life from which she had come.

"Well," she said shortly, "as you have seen, I gave in—I gave in at last."

"Why," Bulstrode asked abruptly, "did he leave you?"

But instead of answering him, the girl said: "But you don't ask me why I sent for him to come?"

He was silent.

Here she hid her face and through her fingers he could see the red rise all along her cheek. Her attitude, and more what she implied than what she said, and what he thought and feared, made the situation too much for him. With a slight exclamation he put his arm about her and drew her to him. As she rested against him he could feel her relax, hear her sigh deeply. But, as he bent over her, she besought him to let her go, to set her free, and he obeyed at once.

"There," she said, "don't do that again—don't! Pollona left me because he was jealous of you."

But at this, in sheer unbelief, her hearer exclaimed: "Oh, my dear girl!"

"Oh, yes," she nodded, "when he found that I did not love him, that I could never love him, he forced me to tell him the truth. Oh, don't be afraid," she said, as though she anticipated his anger, "you are in no wise connected with it. He thinks of me as a romantic, foolish girl. He has laughed at me, tried to shake my faith, to destroy my ideal, but at least he was honest enough to believe me; and that is all I asked of him."

Not for a moment did Bulstrode feel that she was weaving a web for him. There was something about her so sincere and simple, she was so fragile and fine and fair, there was so much of distinction in all she did and said that it put her well nigh, one might say touchingly, apart from the class to which she belonged. Her art and her knocking about, instead of coarsening her, had refined her. She looked like a bit of ivory, worn by experience, and struggle, to a fine polish; there was a brilliance about her and he understood and felt, he instinctively saw and knew, that she was unspoiled.

It took him some half second to pull himself together. Then to turn her thoughts from him, his from her, if he might, he questioned:

"What sort of a man is Prince Pollona?"

"Oh," she cried warmly, "the best! a kind, good, honorable friend. He deserves something better than the horrors I have put him through, poor dear!"

"He seemed very devoted to you," Bulstrode said, "if one could judge."

Not without pride she admitted that he was, and that the Prince had always wanted to marry her. "I might have married him," she repeated, "easily a score of times. But how it appears to interest you——" she said jealously.

"Only as he interests you," replied Bulstrode, "and what you tell me is a great satisfaction. To be the Princess Pollona is an honor that many women would be glad to have conferred upon them." Felicia Warren's good looks were undeniable, her *genre* was exquisite, and Bulstrode, again with no effort, believed all she said. Princes had married far less royal-looking women, of far more humble antecedents than Felicia Warren.

"Oh, his rank didn't dazzle me," she murmured absently, "they seem all alike, and when they find out that I am not a certain kind they ask me to marry them... But if I could only get back to the Mill on the Rose, Mr. Bulstrode! If I might again see it as I used, if I could see you there as I used to see you—walk by your side; row with you on the river; if I could hear the wheel again as I used to hear it, then"—her voice was delicious, a very note of the river of which she spoke. Oh, she must act well, there was no doubt about that; no wonder she had been a success: "If I might walk there with you—titles, even my art and all the rest"—she did not apparently dare to look at

him as she spoke, but fixed her eyes across the room as if she saw back twelve years into — shire ... "if I could *only, only* go back again with you!"

In spite of himself, carried away by her voice, Bulstrode said:

"You shall, you shall go back with me!"

"Oh, Mr. Bulstrode," she gave a little cry and caught his hand, steadying herself by the act.

"Wait," he murmured, "wait, let me think it all out." And, as she had done, Bulstrode walked over to the window, to the balcony where the fresh air met his face, where the breath from the sea fanned him, blended with the scent of the meadow. Before Bulstrode the first reflection of the morning lay like silver on the sea.

When he finally went back into the room, Felicia Warren had not moved. Just as he left her, she sat, deep back into the divan, leaning on her hand, with something like the glory of a dream on her face. Standing in front of her, he said slowly:

"I'm entirely free. No one in the world depends upon me. I have no tie, or bond to my life. I have freedom and money. So far—if what you say is all true, don't start so, for I believe it, every word—so far, I have spoiled your life."

But the girl shook her head.

"Oh, no, *you haven't*," she assured him. "We make our own lives, I expect, and I told you that I could remember everything you ever said to me in the past—you never lied to me, and you were never anything but kind and dear. I've been a fool, a fool!"

Sitting there in her fragile evening dress, its ruffles torn where they had trailed across the pebbles in the street, the disorder of the room around her, its evidence of a homeless, wandering life, she seemed like a bit of flotsam that, no matter from what ship it had been blown, had at last drifted along the shore to his feet. Unhappy and deserted, she reached the very tenderest part of Bulstrode's nature. Cost him what it would, he must save her.

But, as though the girl, with an instinctive fineness divined, she rose and going over to him very gently, laid her hand on his shoulder:

"You must go *now*: that is what I ask you to do. I have seemed, and indeed I have thrown myself upon your mercy; but, in reality, I don't do any such thing. You will soon forget me, as you have been able to do all these years. The table is full of your money. I am poor, and yet I don't take it. Doesn't *that* prove a little my good faith? Doesn't it? Only think of me as the most romantic dreamer you ever saw, and of nothing more. Oh, *no*," she breathed softly, "*no*, a thousand times...!"

"I've answered your question before you've asked it! No, I couldn't; no woman who wants love is content with pity. I would rather starve than take money from you although I have lived on your money for years. I would rather be unhappy than take what you could offer me for love. You mustn't speak; you mustn't ask me. The temptation is very great, you know, and it *might* wreck me. No, Mr. Bulstrode, and the reason why I say it is because I've seen."

"I've seen?" he repeated her words. "You've seen, but what do you mean—what have you seen?"

"I'm going to tell you why I sent for Prince Pollona, although you don't ask me. I came to Trouville alone. I saw you; I've watched you with your friends." Bulstrode accepted quietly. "The two young people are engaged to be married and the other two are husband and wife—well...?"

A spasm of pain crossed Felicia Warren's face and she put what she had to say with singular delicacy for an actress who had risen from the people.

"I know," she said, "I understand, but when I saw you, I knew that there was no hope for any other woman who loved you—and I gave you up then. I sent for Pollona."

The introduction of even so little into the room as the suggestion of the woman he loved, startled Bulstrode as nothing else under the circumstances could have done. It struck him like a lash. He was disenchanted, and he more quietly considered the girl whose confession and whose beauty had made him nearly disloyal.

Felicia Warren, as though she took it in her own hands and, mistress of herself, knew how much she could take and what she could deny herself, laid her hand on his arm.

"You can do nothing at all, just as you have always done—and I—I can learn to forget. But I have refused your money to-night," she said piteously, "haven't I? and I am penniless; I have refused more too; perhaps what no woman who loves could refuse as well. Don't you think that there is something due me? Answer me this? Tell me. You *do* love her, you *do*?"

As she leaned against him, the years seemed to fall away and to leave her a girl again, nothing more than a child he had known. He took her face between his hands and looked into it

as one might look into a well. He saw nothing but his own reflection there.

"God knows," he said deeply, "I could not willingly pain a living creature, and to think that I should have made you suffer, have made a woman suffer for years. Let me do all I can, my dear, let me—let me!"

"You love her?" she persisted.

His hands dropped to his side. "With all my soul," he said, "with all my soul!" He thought she would sink to the floor, but instead she caught fast hold of the table on which his money lay. She leaned on it heavily, refusing his aid. He took one of the girl's cold hands in his.

"Listen, listen! Let me say a word. How do you think it makes a man feel to hear what you have told me to-night? to see you as you are, to grow to know you in such a short—in such a terrible way, and in a few hours to grow to know you so well, to find you dear, desirable, and then to leave you, as you tell me I must leave you. I can't do it; I have never been so miserable in my life, and if I find I am entirely helpless to serve you I can never get over the regret."

Felicia Warren turned a little.

"I have found you near disaster," Bulstrode urged, "I must and will see you to the shore. If you utterly refuse to let me take care of you as I can and will, will you then," he hesitated, then brought it out—"Will *you* marry Prince Pollona?"

She drew from him with a cry, and by what he said she seemed to have gained sudden strength.

"My God!" she breathed, "You ask me *that*? Oh, it proves, it proves how less than nothing I am..."

Bulstrode saw he could not, must not undeceive her.

"If you wish me to do *that*," she cried. "Oh, how dreadfully, how cruelly, it breaks my dream!"

Bulstrode said authoritatively, "Listen! listen for one moment."

The eyes of the girl were dark with defiance; she brushed her hair off her brow with the back of her hand and stared straight before her.

"—Otherwise," said Bulstrode, "I will remain here; I shall not leave these rooms till morning and you will then be forced to marry me, and since you think as you do, since I have told you my secret, ruin perhaps three lives."

He had her at bay, and for a brief second, he thought she would accept his menace. But then in a sudden her anger vanished and her face softened.

"You know," she said, "that, loving you as I do, whatever you tell me to do, I must. But let me go on with my career. Let me work, let me work, and be free!"

He said decidedly, "No! You must be protected from yourself; you must have some one with you who will take care of you as I cannot do. You must do this for me. Is Pollona distasteful to you?" he pursued, "do you *hate* him?"

She made an indifferent shrug of her shoulders.

Bulstrode was watching her face keenly, and after a second said, "No, you do not hate him. You sent for him to come to you here. He was the one to whom you turned, Felicia; turn to him now."

As she wavered and hesitated, he insisted, coming close to her:

"You have an ideal, you told me—well we can't get on without them. Your ideal has helped you, hasn't it? It seems pretty well to have stood by you. I have one too, you must understand that, and I ask you to help me to keep it secret now."

"Why, what do you mean?" she questioned breathlessly.

"I mean," he said gravely, "that I am a very lonely man. My days are absolutely desolate excepting for those things that I can put into them. I have nothing in my life and I am not meant for such a lot. I am not meant for that! Such an existence has bitter temptations for every man, and although I have never seen you before, possibly my fate and Pollona's rest to-night with you."

Felicia Warren turned her great eyes with a sort of wonder to him. They rested on him with a tenderness that he could not long have borne.

"You must not remain unmarried," he said, "you must not."

Without answering him she went slowly over to her little desk. She wrote a few seconds there and came back and handed to him a little slip of paper.

"When the telegraph office opens to-day, will you send this dispatch for me? It will fetch Prince Pollona to me no matter where he may be. I have asked him to meet me in Paris and I will take the morning train from here myself."

She turned to the table on which his money lay and taking a roll of notes said, "I will pay up everything I owe here. I think I have given you every proof, every proof."

Bulstrode made no advance towards her. He saw how she struggled with her emotion. He let her get herself in hand. Finally, with more composure, she spoke again:

"I play next month in London. Will you come to see me play?"

"Oh, many times."

"No," Felicia Warren murmured, "only once, and after that I shall never see you again."

He would have protested, but she repeated, "never again," with such intensity that he bowed his head and he found that her decision brought a pang whose sharpness he wondered would last how long.

He had started, with her last words, toward the door and she followed him over to it. There, detaining him by her hand, she asked softly: "Does she, too, love you as much as this?"

Bulstrode hesitated; then said, "I do not know."

"Not know?" cried the girl, "you don't know?"

It was with the greatest difficulty that Bulstrode could at any time bring to his lips even the name of the woman he loved. At this moment the vision of her as he had seen her lately on her husband's arm going in under the pavilion of the hôtel crossed his mind with a cruel despair and cruel disgust. A sense of his solitude, of his defrauded life, rushed over him as he looked into the eyes of this woman who loved him.

"No," he said intensely, "I do not know, I do not know. I have a code of honor a million years old, but I live up to it. She is a wife, I have never told her that I love her."

The girl's incredulity and surprise were great. It showed in the smile which, something like happiness, crossed her lips. She drew a long breath; she held his eyes with hers, then she laid both her arms around his neck and Bulstrode bent and kissed her. He held her for one moment and his heart, if it beat for another woman, beat hard and fast and its pulse ran through her own. Then Felicia heard the door close and the footsteps of the man died away.

It was seven o'clock when Bulstrode found himself out in the streets. The fresh air in a keen, salt wind poured over him. Down on the beach, for a couple of francs he bribed an attendant to open a bath-house for him, and a few moments later, shivering a little in the keen air, he could have been seen running down to the sea, and in a few moments more his strong swift strokes had carried him far out into the waters which the summer sun even at this early hour was fast turning into blue.

When Jimmy came to himself, he found that without either seeing Mrs. Falconer again or having even bidden a decent good-bye or godspeed to his fiancée, he was back again in Paris. He had run away. Well, that wasn't any new thing, he was always at it. Paris, in the month of August, gave him a hot, desolate welcome, and it was with difficulty that he could find a lawyer who would help him down to bedrock and put in motion the business of winding up the affairs of Molly and her Marquis.

De Presle-Vaulx came to town and found his champion there and brought him many messages from the ladies as well as a letter which Bulstrode put in his pocket to read down in the country at the château of Vaulxgoron in the seclusion of his own room.

Bulstrode played the part of the "American Uncle" to perfection. He let the old Marquis beat him at backgammon; he wandered all over the property with the Marquise. He bought the young man for Molly Malines and closed up his beneficent affairs in a very decent manner indeed, but on the night when Mrs. Falconer and Miss Malines should have arrived at the château, Bulstrode ran away again. From then on he became a wandering Jew. He ran up to Norway, fished a little, then took a motor and some people, who did not know any one whom he had ever known, and drove them through Italy. He continued to travel a little longer, working his way northward until finally—so he put it—dusty as "Dusty Dog Dingo," tired as "Tired Dog Dingo," Bulstrode found himself in London, drew a deep breath and capitulated.

THE SIXTH ADVENTURE

VI

IN WHICH HE DISCARDS A KNAVE AND SAVES A QUEEN

The morning he left for Westboro' Castle, Bulstrode remembers as being the most beautiful of days; it came to him like a golden gift of unrivalled loveliness as it broke and showered sunlight over England.

"The very crannies of the island," he smiled at his own conceit, "must filter out this gold to the sea."

England lay like a viking's cup full to the brim of sunlight; especially entrancing because unusual in the British calendar, and enchanting to the American gentleman because it absolutely accorded with his own mood.

It was middle November, and yet there was not—so it seemed as one looked at yellow and copper luxuriance—a leaf lost from the suave harmony of the trees. Farms, tiled and thatched, basked in summery warmth, forest, hedge and copse, full-foliaged and abundant, shone out in copper and bronze, and the air's stillness, the patient tranquillity, enfolding the land, made it seem expectantly to wait for some sudden wind that should ultimately cast devastation through the forests.

On leaving his ship at Plymouth the day before, Bulstrode found amongst other letters in his mail the Duke of Westboro's invitation for a week's shooting in the west of England: "There were sure to be heaps of people Jimmy would know"—and Bulstrode eagerly read the subjoined list of names until he saw in a flash the name of the One Woman in the World. He at once telegraphed his acceptance.

The following afternoon he threw his evening papers and overcoat into a first-class carriage whilst the guard placed his valise and dressing-case in the rack.

As there had been several minutes to starting time, he had not immediately taken his seat, but had stood smoking by the side of his carriage. He might, and did, doubtless, pass with others of the well set-up, well-looking men travelling on that day, for an Englishman, but closer observation showed his attire to be distinguished by that personal note which marks the cosmopolitan whose taste has been more or less tempted by certain fantasies of other countries. Bulstrode's clothes were brown, his gloves, cravat, and boots all in the same color scheme—one mentions a man's dress only on rare occasions, as on this certain day one has been led to mention the weather. That a man is perfectly turned out should, like the weather, be taken for granted. Bulstrode on this day, travelling as he was towards a goal, towards the one person he wanted above all to see, had spent some unusual thought on his toilet. At all events, on passing a florist's in Piccadilly, after giving his order for flowers to be boxed and expressed to Westboro', he had selected a tiny reddish-brown chrysanthemum which now covered the button-hole of his coat's lapel; it created a distinctive scheme of color. In point of fact it caught the eye of the lady who, hurrying from the waiting-room towards the Westboro' express, caught sight of the American and started. It appeared as if she would speak to him, half advanced, thought better of it, and said to the guard, who was about to fasten a placard on the window of a carriage:

"Please—just a second—won't you, guard?"

The bell rang, and Bulstrode found himself helping the lady into his own compartment. The guard shut the door, which closed with the customary soft thick sound of a lock setting, and pasted over the window the exclusive and forbidding paper—RESERVED.

Then it was in his corner by the window, once chimney pots and suburbs left behind, that the traveller to Westboro' watched the landscape with the pale, transparent smoke from the little farms floating like veils across the golden atmosphere; the slow winding streams between low-bushed, rosy shores, and red-tinged thickets; the flocks of rooks across fields long harvested: the flocks of sheep on the gently swelling downs.

"England, England," he murmured, as if it were a refrain in whose melody he found much charm, as if his traditions of insular forebears might in some way be recalled in the word, as if it spoke more than a chance traveller's appreciation for the melodious countryside.

He had letters, read them, and put his correspondence aside, then comfortably settling himself in his corner, began to construct for himself a picture of Westboro', whose lines and architecture he knew from photographs, although he had never been there. It was agreeable to him as he mused to fancy himself for the first time with Mrs. Falconer in England, in the country they preferred to all the others in the Old World. They were in sympathy with English life and manners, and here, if (oh, of course, a world of "ifs")—here no doubt they would both choose to

live when abroad, were there any choice for them of mutual life.

Westboro' is Elizabethan and of vast proportions. The house would naturally be very full—how much of the time would they discover for themselves? There would decidedly be occasions. Mary Falconer did not hunt, and although Jimmy Bulstrode could recall having postulated that "there are only two real occupations for a real man—to kill and to love," he also knew what precedence he himself gave, and how little the sportsmen of Westboro' would have cause to fear his concurrence if by lucky chance in more or less of solitude he should find his lady there.

It was months since he had seen Mrs. Falconer—months. It had been a long exile. Each time that he started out to run away, it was just that—running away—it was with a curious wonder whether or not on his return he should not find a change. Time and absence—above all, time, worked extraordinary infidelities in other people. Why should they two believe themselves immune? The long months might have altered *her*. The mischief was yet to be seen. But when in the list of noble names he had in his hand, his eyes fell upon the single prefix—*Mrs.*—and found it followed by *The Name*, if he had not sincerely known before, his pulse at sight of the written words told Jimmy that he had not, at all events, changed!

Thinking at this point to light a cigarette, he became at the second mindful of the other passenger in his carriage and that they were alone. As he looked across towards the lady who had unwound her dark veil, he observed that she was herself smoking, holding the cigarette in her hand as with head turned from him she scanned the landscape through the window of the compartment.

He saw with a little start of pleasure what a delight she gave to the eye, tastefully dressed as she too was, in leaf brown from head to foot, with the slightest indication of forest green at buttons and hem of her dress. Her hat, with its drooping feathers, fell rather low over her wonderful hair, bronze in its reflections. Indeed, the lady blended well with the November landscape, and as she apparently was not conscious of her companion, he enjoyed the harmonious note she made to the full.

"What scope," he mused, "what scope they all have—and how prettily they most of them know it! So just to sit and be a thing of beauty; with head half-drooping, and eyelash meditative, one hand ungloved, and such a perfectly lovely hand...! (It held the half-smoked cigarette, but his taste was not offended.) He thought her a whim too debonnaire for a Parisian of the best world, and of *that* she most distinctly was—Austrian more than likely. Every woman has her history—only when she is part of several has she a past. What had this woman so to meditate upon? She turned and he met her eyes.

"You have naturally waited for me to speak first," she said with a gracious gesture of her bare hand. "And *I* was waiting till you should have finished your letters! I, too, have wanted to think."

Her familiar address, perfectly courteous and made in a pleasant voice, with a very slight accent, was a surprise to her companion, who mechanically lifted his hat as he bowed to her across the narrow distance between their seats.

"The guard," she smiled, "came very near putting the placard on the other window! But I think we are now quite sure to be alone!" She pointed to the seat opposite. "Sit there," she more commanded than permitted, "we can talk better and I can watch your kind face, which always looks as if you understood—and I shall be able to please you better—perhaps to make you not unkind to me."

He obeyed, taking the place indicated without hesitation, and as he sat facing her, he saw her to be one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. There was at once something dazzling about her—and at the same time familiar... He had surely met her, and not long ago. Where? And how stupid of him to have forgotten! Or had he only seen her photograph and remarked her as a celebrity whose type of looks had pleased him? But no, she knew him: that was clear. He met her friendly eyes, where liking was evident as well as the suggestion of something akin to an appeal. Bulstrode was greatly intrigued.

"Unkind?" he repeated vaguely. "But why should you think that? Please me?"—and his graciousness did not fall short of her own—"But why should you...?"

"Oh, true," she interrupted him, "quite true. There is no reason why—" and she made a rather petulant gesture—"yet every woman wants to please, and none of us relishes being judged. Never mind, however, don't think of me as a *person*—just let me talk to you frankly, be myself for once with someone if I can."

Jimmy Bulstrode gathered himself together and sat back in his corner. She was very lovely at it, this being herself. Gallantry would not let him bluntly tell her that she had made a mistake. A second more would clear the matter and would be quite soon enough, for him at least, to find that they were total strangers. Unless, indeed, he had met her and forgotten it. They had possibly held some conversation together in a London drawing-room. But how could he have been such a boor as to forget her? She was neither a crook nor a mad woman—she might be an adventuress; if so, she was an unusual one. He glanced at her luggage as if it might help him—a dark-covered dressing-case, bundle of furs, and rugs—new, everything new. Her left hand was bare of rings,

she clasped it with her gloved fellow and said warmly:

"I can't believe it possible that you came, actually came, and that we have so smoothly met! I can't believe nothing has hitched or missed, or that everything is so cleverly planned and arranged for me, and least of all I can believe that it should be *you* who are so sublimely doing this."

"Ah—" But here Bulstrode tardily started up. *He* doing it all? At least if he was, then he must, if nothing else—know! He smiled at her with a pleasant sense of being in the secret and with indulgent amusement at her mistake.

"I think—you made a mistake," he began it with commonplaceness, but his gesture softened the words.

But the lady made a little annoyed "tchk" with her tongue against her teeth, and threw up her head with an impatient toss, an intensely foreign way of dismissing his interpolation.

"Don't, in pity's sake, talk like this," she exclaimed. "*Mistake?* Who under the blue heavens *doesn't* make them—Certa! Haven't you, yourself, in spite of your moral, spotless life, haven't even *you* made them?"

"How," flushed the naïve gentleman, on the sudden betrayed into a mental frankness of self-approval near to conceit, "how does *she* know me so well?"

"Who is there," his companion gave him the question in a challenging tone "to tell each other and every one of us what is or will be a mistake in his life? Where were everyone's eyes when I married?—Why didn't someone tell me then that my marriage was a hideous mistake? As for the rest of it..." she turned away for a second towards the window, and Bulstrode saw how the hot blood had mounted and her eyes had changed when after a moment she came back to him again. She put out towards him a beseeching hand: "*You* above all men, who are faithful to an ideal, must not give me old platitudes!"

Bulstrode's head reeled. He felt like a man who after a narcotic finds his brain suddenly alight and real things grow strange. He wanted to rub his eyes. She appeared singularly to appreciate his daze.

"It is as strange to me as it is to you, to find myself here with a man to whom I have never spoken before—to be under his protection, and to talk with him like this; and yet I have seen you so often, I have watched you in the distance, and long since I singled you out as the one man in whom I could fancy confiding—the one man to whom I could give a sacred trust."

With these words the incognita drew herself up, and her manner, with amazing swiftness, changed from a childlike confidence to a dignity not without a certain rigidness, and as Bulstrode remarked this, he also noticed that she was very young, and he was conscious in her of a something he had never quite met in a woman before—an extreme dignity, an ultra poise, an assurance.—Who was she?—And whom did she take him to be? With every turn of the fast wheels of the express it was growing more difficult to explain. She would more keenly feel the fact that he had not cut her frankness short—he had no right to her confidences even though she took their mutual knowledge of each other for granted.

"When," he ventured it delicately—"did you last see me?" It was bold, but it did perfectly.

"Oh, an age ago, isn't it? You were last on the Continent I think in August at Trouville, during La Grande Semaine."

Ah, he reflected, *of course!* *That* was where, amongst so many other celebrities and beauties, she had attracted his attention. But his rapid mental calculations of those seven days could reveal to him no woman's face but one. He found himself even in this unique moment recalling the time following hard on Molly's formal engagement to her Marquis ... and those days were amongst the brightest in his life. No, there had been no foreign element at Trouville for him in the dazzle and freedom of that worldly fortnight—for Jimmy Bulstrode, in all the scene she summoned up, there was but one woman. He came back with a start to the other.

"Then yesterday, as you passed our table at the Carlton, and it seemed as if heaven had sent you to us to help us—at least so we both felt."

And Bulstrode doubtfully smiled and, now determined, broke in, or would have done so, but she waved him imperiously.

"Your mind," she spoke indulgently, "is on the wrong side to-day. Try to think only of the happiness towards which I am going so rapidly, so rapidly." Then, as she with her word glanced out of the window, she cried: "Oh, what if something should happen to the train—what if some horrible delay—"

And he shook himself to action.

"My dear lady," he began gravely, "you must hear me. You have made and are making a great

mistake. I am certainly not the man..."

"I *command* you, sir," she flashed out at him—"surely you will not disobey me—you will not make me think as well that I am making a mistake in you."

"Ah, but that," he gasped, and caught her words gratefully, "is just the point."

She smiled. "Please...! Let me judge! Only don't condemn me. Only be glad you can so marvellously help a human soul to happiness—can so generously lend yourself for these few hours to aid in my escape."

She was escaping! Well, he had nearly guessed it! The new luggage alone was an indication. Unless her mania was for taking strangers to be intimate friends, she wasn't fleeing a madhouse! From what did she so determinedly run?—and how in heaven's name was he helping her? Did she think he was going to marry her? Into what tangle had the man he was unwittingly impersonating got himself—and in default of his appearing on the scene in what would his absence involve poor Bulstrode?

He took off his hat and put it down on the seat—thus his fine head was fully revealed to the lady's view.

"I do not know you," he said determinedly. "You do not know me, but you seem bent on not acknowledging this fact or permitting me to state it."

But even this plain statement did him no good, for she said, quite agreeing with him:

"If I had ever spoken with you—been near you before, I would not be here now. You see it is just your *impersonality*—your *having* no connection with anything in my life that makes it possible! But why," she exclaimed impatiently, "do you spend these few hours with me in this meaningless warfare? You should, it seems, take the honor more graciously, and since you are here, have consented to be here, show me a little kindness. Since, after all, willingly or not, you are in effect nobly helping me to do what I am doing."

And this brought him wonderfully up to the question of what was he doing? What was he supposed to be furthering here? It was his expression, no doubt, that made her ask with curious aptness: "Just how much *do* you know?"

The poor gentleman threw out his hands desperately. "You can't think how in the dark I am! How beyond words mystified."

"How droll!" she laughed sweetly, "and how amusing and all the more beautiful and like you, to be, in spite of yourself, here. You see we have switched off—just as you said we would do."

So they had indeed: they had stopped, and the fact fetched him to his feet. He looked out: it was a fast express, a through train—the first stop should have been Westboro' Abbey.

"Yes, we're switched off!" she cried delightedly, "as you know: as you arranged so cleverly!—and the Westboro' people will go on without us."

Would they indeed! Lucky people, but not if he could prevent it. But his attention to the train's procedure had come too late.

He opened the window and looked out. They stood at the side of a switch some three hundred yards above a small squat station, and in the far distance Bulstrode could see the end of a disappearing train. He drew in his head and quietly asked his companion:

"What has happened to us, do you know?"

She laughed deliciously. "Know? Why, of course, I do. You're delightful! Of course I have followed every step of the plan—the special for Dover picks us up here in three-quarters of an hour, doesn't it? We make the boat for Calais, and there Gela meets me and *your* mission is done!"

The gentleman opposite her listened quietly, and before speaking waited a second, staring down at her, his hands in his pockets: there they touched a little coin which he always carried: a coin that opened at a sacred point to discover to his eyes alone a picture of a woman as lovely as this woman, as human, and one whom he had good cause to suppose loved another man than her husband. The woman opposite him was escaping from her husband. *That* was what she was doing! He who had striven for fifteen years to prevent the like in the life of the one woman of all, now appeared to be helping this poor thing to the same thing. He did not believe he was to be waylaid and robbed, or that any trick had been played upon him. The only thing he did *not* believe was that the woman knew him! Before, however, brushing the delusion aside, he asked, his candid eyes upon her: "And my mission being so done, what then becomes of you?"

The shrug of her shoulders was neither an indication of indifference nor a pretty desperation! it rather was a relinquishing of herself wholly to Fate—an abandon.

"What becomes of a happy woman who goes with the man she loves?"

"Her Fate," said her companion, "has no single history. She is most often disillusioned, many times tragic, and always disgraceful."

"Ah, hush," she said angrily, "you presume too far. If you only intended to lecture me—to condemn me—why did you come?"

At this sincerely humorous challenge Bulstrode smiled.

"I did not, to be quite accurate, come," he said, "and I assure you I am here against my will. You refuse to listen to me; you turn my efforts to put things straight against me—and now."

The handsome creature gave him a flash from angry eyes.

"Your Excellency is scarcely polite. But I understand. Even my rank doesn't protect me: and although your old friendship for Gela did overcome your scruples, and our letters did touch you—still we should have remembered that you are, above all else, the King's friend."

Bulstrode fell a step back. Before he could take in the curious honors that were being thrust upon him, the lady went hotly on:

"You know how indulgent of me the King has been: how he adores me still, how blind he is, and you pity him and have no mercy for me."

Here, for she, too, had left her seat, she went over to the compartment window and turning her back full on Bulstrode, stood looking out, and she thus gave him time and he took it, not to consider his part of the affair, but, as if it had been suddenly revealed to him by her words, the woman's part in it. After all it was scarcely important whom, in error, she believed him to be. In a strange fashion, through some trick of resemblance, he was here and in her confidence in another's stead—impersonating some man who, in spite of the reputation for goodness and honor accredited him by this lady, would scarcely, Bulstrode felt confident, be as scrupulous regarding the adventure as he himself was fast becoming. The woman—the woman was all that mattered. She was a Queen then? A Queen! And he had so naively ignored her perquisites, been so innocently guilty of *lèse-majesté*—that she, poor thing, attributed his *sans gêne* to her fallen state!

Kings and Queens, poor dears, how human they are! What royalty could she be? And what King's friend was he so closely supposed to be? The King's friend—well, so he was—so he must be in spite of his quick pity for the lovely creature—in spite of chivalry and the trust she displayed. But to be practical: what in half an hour could he hope to accomplish—how could he keep a determined woman from wrecking her life?

His mind flew to Paddington, and his first sight of the lady on the platform. There had been near the hour two trains for Westboro', one of them a local which left London some few minutes later than the Western express. *That* later train, no doubt of it, would fetch the real accomplice to the eloping lady. Bulstrode argued that, should he declare himself to the Queen at this point for a total stranger, the revelation would plunge her in despair, anger and frighten her, and lose him his cause—There was, in view of the cause, he now felt and nerved himself to the deception, nothing to do but to assume his rôle in earnest and play it as well as he might. He had never sat alone in a travelling carriage and hobnobbed with a Queen, but he gracefully made his try at the proper address: "Your Majesty," he began, and she whirled quickly round, pleasure on her face.

"Oh, Gresthaven!" she exclaimed with touching gratitude, extending her hand. "Thanks, mon ami! I shall not have my title long, and I shall, I suppose, miss it with other things."

Bulstrode, with her naming of him, knew at length who he was, and recalled his supposed likeness to a certain Lord Almouth Gresthaven—famous explorer, traveller and diplomat, cosmopolitan in his tastes and a dabbler in the politics of other and less significant countries than his own. In accepting his new personality, the American winced a little as he bowed over the royal little hand and kissed it.

"Your Majesty will miss many things indeed," he said gravely—"your kingdom, your people, and the King—the King," he repeated, dwelling on the word, "who, as you say, loves you."

"My good friend," the lady made a little *moue*—"I know everything you would say. You can't suppose I haven't thought of it all? To be so far on my way must I not have carefully considered every step? One is, after all, a woman—and I am a woman in love."

"One word then," pleaded her unwilling imposter—"one word. Have you also asked yourself: what chance for happiness a woman can possibly hope for with a man who allows her to make the sacrifice you are about to make?"

If his words were straws before the wind to the woman, his simplicity was impressive to her. "It has seemed to me," Jimmy Bulstrode said, "that there is a great distinction between love and passion—and that however great his passion for her, a man should supremely—*supremely love* the woman he singles out of all the world."

The Queen of Poltavia looked at the gentleman before her, who stood very straight, his head

alone bent, his clear fine eyes fixed upon her own.

"Love!" she repeated softly, "how well you say the word."

A slight flush stole up the American's cheek.

"Supreme love," he ventured to continue, "means protection to the woman...."

Here the Queen made an impatient gesture as though she shook away the impression his tone made.

"My dear Gresthaven," she exclaimed, "love means above all else happiness! One is happy with one person and miserable with another. It's all a lottery and unless our plans miscarry I am going towards the greatest happiness in the world. But come"—She altered her tone to one of practical command—"Let us address ourselves to our flight. You have your train schedule of course? The Dover train is due here at 4:50 and it only waits for the taking on of our carriage." As she looked up at him she saw the trouble in his face, and a solicitude for her to which she was unaccustomed.

"Mon cher ami," she said quizzically, "what, may I ask, since your scruples are so great, ever led you to accept this mission....?"

"Frankly," he eagerly answered, and was honest in it, "the hope, the desire that I might...."

"Persuade a woman in love against her heart?" she smiled, and so sweetly, so convincingly, and so reasonably, he was for an instant all on her side.

"I see my folly, your Majesty."

"There's nothing but *force majeure*, Gresthaven...."

"Yes" ... he admitted reluctantly. "Let me go out now and see to our manoeuvres here." He was able to open the door which a passing guard had unlocked unobserved....

The innocent royalty let him pass, thanking him with a smile, and saw him go down the track toward the little squat station, with the guards.

Bulstrode, whose mind as he walked along was busy with train schedules, recalled, nevertheless, the Duke's letter, which he still had in his letter case, and he took it from his pocket and re-read it.

"... We are to have over the week-end a dash of royalty. Carmen-Magda, the Queen of the petty kingdom of Poltavia." (This mention of the Westboro' guests had quite escaped Bulstrode's mind in his contemplation of the last page of the Duke's note.... "We are to have a compatriot of your own, a Mrs. Jack Falconer.") And royalty being very relative to the unsnobbish American, he had simply transferred the title (with possibly a possessive pronoun before it) to the other lady! He smiled as he reflected that the Westboro' express was destined to arrive at the Abbey without either the royal guest or Mr. James Thatcher Bulstrode. But more to the point, more instantly absorbing was the fact, that within ten minutes the slow train from London to Westboro' would arrive at Radleigh Bucks, the little station before which he now stood, and from it, undoubtedly, would descend the real Lord Gresthaven. If Jimmy needed encouragement in his self-imposed rôle of Master of Fate, if he needed to forget the ardor and the determination of the little Queen, if he needed to forget how, in youth, he had cordially hated those interfering people who, on horseback and in chaises, tore after flying lovers to waylay them at Gretna Green—he found his stimulus in recalling that he was "the King's friend."

"It's after all something of a distinction," he mused, entertained by the idea, "a sort of royal *noblesse oblige*—and since the poor dear herself has so made me out to be, given King the precedence, how could I, in the cause of gallantry, have proceeded otherwise! It's this diabolical little brown chrysanthemum," he mentally laid the fault there. "It is evidently a telling mark. People in books are always meeting unknowns who are to wear a red flower in the right lapel of the coat".... and he had unintentionally gone over into a romance—and his *triste* part in it was that of an unsympathetic spoiler of a romance.

As after a prolonged parley with the station officials he walked leisurely back to his carriage, his wallet grown very thin indeed and his honest heart suffering many sincere pangs at the contemplation of his conduct altogether, he argued: "She is absurdly young—she will, after a little, go back to her allegiance (he put it so), and I don't take much stock in that barbaric Gela anyway, he probably is a Hungarian band-master or a handsome ticket-agent, a plebian creature whose very remoteness from her own life has fascinated her."

Bulstrode, not quite sure just whom he was supposed to be by the train people, found himself bowed and escorted back to the carriage which had been turned and manipulated and side-tracked—reswitched and displaced, till even its own locomotive and train of cars would have been at a loss to find it. He had the sense of being a traitor, brute, imposter, and Providence all in

one—which combination of qualities was sufficient to explain his embarrassment and his nervous manner when he at length rejoined the Queen.

There was a slight transformation in the lady whose dressing bag had aided, evidently, a brisk toilet. Under her chin flowered out a snowy bow of tulle, and she had swathed herself in the thick veil she had worn when first boarding the train. Indicating her disguise to Bulstrode, she said with her pretty accent: "I think it well to be thus." And he agreed that it was well.

His own agitation as the other train rushed in, slowed and halted, was scarcely less than hers, indeed perhaps greater, for Carmen-Magda, pale and quiet, her handsome brown eyes fixed on the window-pane, gave no sign of life, until after a series of jerks, jolts and bumps, they slowly but certainly became part of a moving train, once more undertaking its journey. Then Bulstrode, who stood determinedly in the window, filled it up on the station side, giving her no chance to look out had she wished to do so, nor did he think it needful to tell the Queen what he saw: A distinguished-looking man in rough brown clothes, and oh, the curious coincidence: a reddish-brown chrysanthemum in his buttonhole. His Striking Resemblance was accompanied by another gentleman—short and stout with military mustaches, and swarthy complexion. The two men were gesticulating wildly together, and as the train pulled away from them, Bulstrode turned about and faced the little Queen.

She had again lifted her veil, and he thought her pallor natural; in the momentary excitement her large eyes were fastened upon him with a touching confidence that nearly made the soft-hearted imposter regret the boldest act of his history.

"Are you sure," she asked him softly, "that this is the right train?"

The coquetry of her bow of snowy tulle, the debonnaire costume of brown and green, her gray hat with its feathers, were pathetic to him—her attire contrasted sadly with her pale face. She was to him like a wilful child. Not more, he decided for the sixth time, than twenty years old. She was like a paper queen out of a child's fairy book, all but her anxious face. "She regrets," he joyfully caught at the thought to arm himself and give himself right. "Poor little thing, she already regrets."

Leaning forward, he suggested kindly:

"Can't your Majesty rest a little?"

As he spoke the hypocrite knew that in less time than it would take to settle her they would bump into the station at Westboro' Abbey.

But Carmen-Magda made no sign of recalcitrancy or regret that she was *en route* for her plebian Gela. She leaned over and picked up one of the illustrated papers upon the seat and idly turned over the pages, reverting finally back to the frontispiece where a colored photograph displayed a young woman in hunting dress leaning on the arm of a military-looking gentleman with black mustaches and swarthy skin. She held it out to Bulstrode and said:

"It's a poor enough picture of me, but excellent, isn't it, of the King?"

Bulstrode looked at it attentively with an inscrutable illumination on his face.

"Yes, it is good of the King, very good indeed," he exclaimed with much animation. It was strikingly so, he could with truth say it.

Gresthaven had proved himself to be the friend of the King par excellence—the King seemed to have many friends—and the poor little woman opposite—with her fetching bow of tulle and her mad confidence in a stranger—her madder confidence in Lord Almouth Gresthaven—where were *her* friends? Jimmy leaned to her, and Mrs. Falconer could have told that it was his voice of goodness that spoke, the voice "that Jimmy seemed able to call at will from some wonderfully dear part of his nature: it was for people in trouble, for people he was determined to help in spite of themselves."

"Your Majesty has done me great honor," Bulstrode said. "You have said I was the King's friend, I should like instead to be *your* friend. Women need friends ... even queens. Would it be too vast a presumption if I should from henceforth feel myself to be...." He waited and dared—"Carmen-Magda's friend?"

His innocent *lèse-majesté*, coupled with the tone he used, reached the woman in her—not to speak of his personal charm.

"Didn't I imply friendship when I chose you for this mission?" she said.

He winced. "Of course—but I mean from now on——"

She nodded sweetly. "*Cela va sans dire*, Gresthaven."

"Don't call me so," he interrupted, "say *friend*, to please me."

She laughed.

"You are too amusing. I will say it for you then in Poltavian. It's a sacred word with us," and she called him friend in her own tongue with the prettiest accent and a royal inclination of her head as if she knighted him. It cut him and pleased him at once, and he hurried to ask her:

"What would you think of Gresthaven if, instead of meeting you, as you had arranged he should do—he should betray you—should have warned your husband and have gone so far *as to fetch the King to waylay you and stop your flight!*"

But Carmen-Magda only laughed, and dismissed the ridiculous supposition with a word of disbelief.

"Tell me," Bulstrode urged, "tell me what would you think?"

She drew herself up haughtily at his insistence as if his hypothesis were real to her at last:

"He would be the most despicable traitor in the world."

Bulstrode pursued: "What—would you think of Gresthaven—if in order to save you, to give you time, time to think, to reflect, to perhaps alter your decision—he had used other means less cruel possibly, but as surely betraying your good faith?"

Here she looked keenly through him—read him—then waited a second before intensely exclaiming:

"Gresthaven—*what have you done?*"

His heart came into his throat and his voice nearly failed him. He did not know Poltavians nor the queenly temper, nor did he know how all women take any one given thing, but he knew how women the world over admit of no change of caprice saving that variability which arises in their own minds.

"Oh, dear," he thought, "if for no matter *what* reason, she had only changed her *own* mind!"

"In five minutes," he said bravely—"your Majesty will be at Westboro' Abbey station, our carriage has been attached to the other train which followed us from London."

With a smothered cry the Queen sprang to her feet, rushed to the window and stared out where nothing in the golden afternoon beauty revealed to her in what part of England she was. Bulstrode had put his hand out before her as if he feared she meditated climbing through the open window.

"Oh," she cried furiously, shrinking back from him, "how have you dared ... dared?"

... "To save your Majesty? Well, it *was* hard!" he acknowledged practically. "Harder than you will ever believe. I may say that no decision was ever more difficult to make. To be so trusted by you, and to feel myself a double-dyed villain wasn't agreeable, but the issue was a warrant for any treachery."

"Great heavens!" she exclaimed. "Who made *you* judge of my actions, who gave *you* leave to decide my fate, what a fool I was to trust you—what a fool! You have spoiled my life!" she accused him—"You have taken from me everything in the world."

If she had been alone he knew she would have wept, and he kept his face turned from her for some few seconds. "I have certainly established a precedent for myself," he mused with humor. "I can never run away with a woman now—never."

Small as were the limits of the little carriage she found means to walk it up and down several times, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing. She spoke, he supposed, in Poltavian, for he could not follow the meaning of her few staccato, angry words, but he did not recognise among the incoherences that she called him friend!

As the flying scenes grew farm-like and pastoral, and the lines and sweep of what he took to be park property, caught his eyes he once more ventured to speak.

"I am not the cold-blooded traitor I seem, believe me," he tried to plead, "and until we definitely passed the station at Redleigh Bucks I was miserable to think I had, as it seems, betrayed your Majesty. But when as we came up to the station I saw the King on the platform ___"

She stopped short in front of him: "The King!" she exclaimed incredulously.

Bulstrode nodded in a matter-of-fact way as if stray kings on mid-country platforms were the common occurrence of his travelling experiences.

"He had evidently followed you that far, and if the plan formed to attach your carriage to the Dover express had been attempted, you would have been stopped by your husband himself. As it is you are simply going where you are expected to go—to Westboro' Castle."

This dénouement, putting a summary end to her tragic anger, left her no place for ecstasies. She sat down in front of Bulstrode and repeated, dazed:—

"The *King!* The King had followed me! He had been warned then, but by whom? You above all did not....?"

"Oh no!" He was glad to be honestly able to disclaim at least this disloyalty. "I had nothing to do with it. The King had come on with the man who had played your Majesty false all along, the man who is indeed more the King's friend than he is Carmen-Magda's."

And sitting there, bewildered and appealing before him, she heard him say: "I mean Lord Almouth Gresthaven."

She murmured some words in Poltavian, then besought: "Why, why do you play with me?" The tears started to her eyes.

"Lord Gresthaven," Bulstrode hurried now to his confession—"has plainly betrayed you. Either he failed to meet you as planned, or else he came too late and thought better of his connivance against your husband—at all events, both he and the King took the slow train."

"But *you*," she interrupted, staring at him—"You are not Lord Gresthaven?"

"No," he said quietly, "no, I am an American, nothing more than a friend and guest of the Duke of Westboro'. I tried over and over again to tell you this, but you would not hear me and I finally accepted the rôle you gave me with the firm intention of taking you with me to Westboro' Castle. My name is James Thatcher Bulstrode, I am from Boston, in the United States." Bulstrode thus tardily introduced himself.

And Jimmy, not pretending ever to have counted greatly on the favor of princes, was nevertheless taken aback. Not that he had any preconceived notion of what Carmen-Magda would do—when she eventually knew. He had been too absorbed in his mission, its entanglements, and his climax. He may have been prepared for some exhibition of scorn, but he more than likely looked for a social and commonplace ending to their ride, but for what Carmen-Magda did he was entirely unprepared.

As if in his declaration of himself and his identity he had taken a sponge and quite wiped himself off the slate, the Queen, after speechlessly staring at him for a few moments, quietly removed her attention from him altogether. She took from a little bag at her wrist a rouge stick with which she carefully touched her lips; from a tiny gold box she lightly dusted her cheeks with powder; she adjusted her tulle bow and her veil and then sat serenely back waiting until the train should arrive at her forced destination.

Although, one might say, unused to the manners of royalty, Jimmy was dumbfounded; the beautiful woman in forest-brown clothes picked out with hunting green had become as strange to him as in the first moment when she attracted his attention some few miles beyond London. That she should be angry at his interference he could admit, but that she should not be grateful to be saved from her husband's wrath he did not understand. Was he too plebeian for her to notice? He, of course, did not speak to her again, nor did she break the singular silence, and for some reason he did not even care to ask her forgiveness. Finally, he decided that she was thinking solely of Gela, the man at the other end of the route who would wait for her in vain, and when this sentimental view of the case occurred to him, he would have felt *de trop* had he not seen how completely he was ignored.

They flashed past the last miles of wooded valley and hillside. Westboro' was very soft in line and very mellow in the evening light. The landscape, through a half-mist, was as brown and green as the dress of the beautiful silent woman in the opposite corner of the travelling carriage.

Bulstrode, looking at her rather timidly, felt as if he were in a dream.

At Westboro' Abbey the guard unlocked the compartment door and Bulstrode, who got out first, helped the Queen of Poltavia to descend. As she put foot to the ground she said, half leaning on the arm he gave: "I thank you—very much indeed."

He caught the few words eagerly, and was fatuous enough to fancy that she meant something more than the common courteous acknowledgment of a man's help from a travelling carriage.

The station was deserted. The express having arrived some half hour before without them, there had evidently been no preparation made to meet this train.

Surrounded by her luggage, her brand new luggage, the Queen waited on the side of the station that faced the open country, whilst Bulstrode made inquiries about telephoning or getting word to the castle.

At this juncture, down the lane, between red thickets and golden hedges, a smart dog-cart tooled along driven by a lady. She waved a welcoming hand.

"Jimmy," she said as she drove up and leaned out and nodded to him, "I knew you'd miss the

express, you're so absent-minded about trains; and who could be expected to distinguish between a 3.50 and a 3.53? So, as you see, I drove down on the chance."

He had not greeted her in words. The long afternoon, the romantic extravagant episode, of which he had been unwillingly a part, made this woman seem so real. He felt as if from a burlesque extravaganza he had come out into the fresh air; their eyes had met and Mrs. Falconer did not miss any other greeting.

"That lady," he then said, "whom you see standing on the edge of the platform surrounded by her luggage, like a shipwrecked being on a desert island, is the Queen of Poltavia."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Falconer.

"Yes," he said indifferently, "we came down from London together."

"Why, the whole castle is in a state about her. A coach and postillion went to fetch her at the express. Telegrams are flying all over the country. Why did she take a local—and with you—Jimmy?"

"Perhaps she is absent-minded about trains as well," he smiled, "at all events here she certainly is and it will be charming of you to drive her up."

"But I don't know her!"

"Oh," he shrugged, "one doesn't exactly *know* queens, I don't know her either, but that wouldn't prevent my doing her a service. I am sure she'd rather be driven up to a cup of tea and a fire by an American than stand here waiting for a postilion and four. It will be nice of you to speak to her," he suggested, and stepped back.

Gathering up her reins, Mrs. Falconer whisked her horse about and drove up to the lady's side. Bulstrode, from a little distance, watched her graceful inclination and heard her lovely voice. He saw Carmen-Magda lift her disguising veil, displaying her dark, foreign face. Slowly going up to the dog-cart's side, together with the groom's help, he bestowed the Queen's belongings in the trap.

"I will walk on slowly up the road," he suggested, "and most possibly you will send back for me."

"Oh, I'll drive back myself." She was quite certain about it. As he helped the Queen into the dog-cart, as she leaned on his supporting hand, she said:

"Thank you, thank you very much indeed." And he was so vain as to fancy that into tone and words Carmen-Magda put more warmth, more of meaning, than a woman usually puts into the phrase of recognition of a man's helping hand. He could not, moreover, have sworn that at the end of the sentence was not murmured a word in a foreign tongue which might in Poltavian mean "friend," but as he did not understand the language of the country he could not be sure.

As he watched the trap up the hedged lanes out of sight, he rubbed his eyes as if he were not certain whether or not he had not dozed and dreamed in his compartment on the slow train from London.... But at any rate he had the delightful heavenly certainty that this was Westboro' of an Indian summer afternoon—and that of the two women who had just driven up the lane out of sight, one at least was adorably real.

THE SEVENTH ADVENTURE

VII

IN WHICH HE BECOMES THE POSSESSOR OF A CERTAIN PIECE OF PROPERTY

As Bulstrode stood in the window of his room at Westboro' Castle, his face turned toward the country, it seemed to beckon him. It called him from the park's end where suave and smooth the curving downs met the preciser contour of the eastern field; from hedges holding snugly in the roadways, the roads themselves running off on pleasant excursions to townships whose names are suggestive of romance, whose gentle beauties have mellowed with the ages which give them value and leave them perfect.

With the sweetness of a bell, with the invitingness of a beckoning hand, the English countryside summoned the gentleman to come out to it, to explore and penetrate for himself. He gazed charmed and entranced at the expanse of rippling meadow where, enclosed by the curtains of soft old trees, the thatch of the eaves lifted their breast to the sun and mist, and chimneys black with immemorial fires indicated the farms of Westboro', rich, homely and respectable, as they left upon the landscape harmonious color and history of thrift. To the east was the dim suggestion of the little town, and some few miles in a hollow lay the farmlands known as The Dials, and each second growing more distinctly visible in the deepening light rose the towers of Penhaven Abbey.

At the Duke's urging, Bulstrode had been led to stop on at Westboro' Castle after the house party had dissolved at the end of their week's sojourn; and there had since been many long tramps across country, with the dogs at his heels and by his side the Duke, for the time diverted from his semi-melancholy, semi-egotistical cynicism, and transformed into an enthusiastic sport.

The Duke of Westboro' was a *désenchanté*, more truly speaking a victim of other peoples' temperaments. There were, however, not a few little scores in the character of moral delinquencies which at least, so he felt, he had been called upon quite fully to discharge.

The American man gave himself over to his host, and from the time Westboro' put out a bait of "Oh, you're decidedly not turning in at this hour, old man?" he flanked the Duke on the opposite side of the fireplace in the East Library, there after coffee to wear away half the night. During the following fortnight, Bulstrode found that he had tallied up with his friend very closely the scores of the last few miserable years.

Westboro's friendship with him dated back some ten years. Bulstrode had first known the Englishman at Newport where, then not a young man, he had come obviously and frankly in search of an American wife. The search was unusual in that it was not for money, but, as Westboro' put it, for type and race. His mother had been an American. He had adored her, and wanted an American mother for his children. The woman herself—and how Bulstrode saw it as he followed the deserted husband's narrative—the woman had been a secondary thing. He recalled easily the summary and conventional courtship and the vulgar brilliance of the wedding. He had been one of Westboro's ushers, and his smaller part of the affair left him with the distressing idea that he had assisted at a sacrifice.

It would be euphemistic to say that Westboro' poured out his heart to Bulstrode; Englishmen do not have such refreshments. Little by little, rather in short curt phrases, a cynical word whose mocking fellow only followed after some moments' silence—little by little, whilst the smoky wreaths of the men's cigars veiled their confidences, the Duke slowly told the story of ten years of married life. In this intimacy he disclosed the history of the separation which formed at the moment the subject of general public comment. Jimmy was relieved when the moment came that the Duke thought opportune to say:

"There, old chap, you have the whole story! It's this cursed tradition of marriage, and you're a lucky fellow to be free. I have never spoken to any one before—you know it. I don't need to tell you so, but you were in, as it were, at the start, and what do you think of the finish?"

Bulstrode reserved his opinion.

Westboro' Castle had been built in the sixteenth century by a lover of the Virgin Queen. The stones were paved with memories. In the Picture Hall the ardent gentleman three hundred years before had for one sole hour entertained Elizabeth at a feast. She left him, obdurate and unyielding, and he went crazy and followed the royal coach to the park gate, weeping, his hands before his face; and there on the ground, his fair curls torn, and the dust from the departing vehicles alone of the glory that touched him, his people found him.

"How they prate of inequality, and of the crime of grafting the American rose on these old stalks," Bulstrode mused. The beauty of Frances, Duchess of Westboro', he had himself been one of the first to concede; a portrait of her by Lehnbach did not to his eyes do her justice. The fresh purity of her type had not been seized by the German. She would be an ideal Duchess, he had said of her when the mission of Westboro' to America had been bruited, and Westboro' had thought: "She's a strong, fine woman, and will bear me beautiful children."

She had borne him two. Bulstrode, in passing through the house, had seen the low gates at the doors of two sunny rooms, the toys spread as they had been lain. His own were the only apartments in that wing of the castle, and the silence at the end of the hall was never broken. When Westboro' had come to this part of his narrative, he had waited quiet so long that his companion had naturally taken the evening to be at its end. The Duke had thrown his cigar away, and lifting from the table near him a leather case, opened it and handed over to Bulstrode the photograph of two little bare-legged boys in sailor clothes. They stood hand in hand, a pretty pair. Looking at it, and gently turning it over on the other side, Bulstrode read:

"Frederick Cecil John Edward, Marquis of Wotherington, three years old. Guy Perceval, Lord Feversham, aged two years."

Westboro's voice had a dull sound as he took the case from his friend's hand.

"They are Westboro's I think, neck and crop. Scarlet fever—in three days, Bulstrode—both in three days."

And that had been all.

Bulstrode had left the Duke and gone up-stairs. On the other side of his cheerful rooms the empty nurseries in the ghostly moonlight held their doors wide open as if to welcome at the low gates those bright heads if they should come.

Jimmy, whose sentimentality consisted in his acting immediately when anything was to be done, mixed a whiskey and soda from the array of drinks that always exists at an Anglo-Saxon's elbow, and after a turn or two in his dressing-room brought practically out:

"It's ridiculous! Sheer nonsense. There should be children here. The woman is selfish and puritanical, and the man is no lover—*that's* what's the matter! But Westboro' certainly loves her in his big, cold, affectionate way." Jimmy smiled at his own fashion of putting it. And how any woman, with a mind and common-sense, could help loving Westboro' Castle and countryside, as well as Cecil, tenth Duke of the line, the American visitor failed to see.

As the Duke of Westboro' thought of the members of his recent house party—the women of it passed before his mental mirror. There were several images of an American lady whose frocks and hats, whose wit and grace, whose dark beauty had made her stay at Westboro' brilliant and memorable. Possibly the remembrance of Mrs. Falconer, one night at dinner, was what most persistently lingered in the Duke's mind. She had sat on his left in a gown he remembered as becoming, and her jewels had shone like fire on her bosom. He had particularly remarked them in thinking of the idle jewels of his own house, left behind by the flight of the Duchess. Mary Falconer had been more brilliant than her ornaments, and Westboro' had thoroughly enjoyed his guest. He had asked this woman especially because she charmed him; without forming the reason he had a latent hope that she might do more than charm. He wanted to forget and to be eased from the haunting memory that stung and never soothed. From his first tête-a-tête with Mrs. Falconer he had at once seen that there was nothing there for him.

Bulstrode had said that Westboro' was not a lover. Reserved as far as all feeling was concerned, he had made no advances to the beautiful American, but contented himself with watching her. She could not be in love with her brutish husband who, out of the week spent at Westboro' was visible only two days. Then Bulstrode had come. Pictures of the two talking in the long twilights, riding together, walking on the terrace side by side, came vividly to Westboro's recollection.

"That," he decided, "is a real flesh-and-blood woman, the kind of woman I should have married. Bulstrode is a lucky devil."

"A chap," Westboro' said to Jimmy in a mild unpretentious mood of philosophy, "is, of course, a husband; more naturally than people give him credit for, a father; but first of all—and that's what so few women take into consideration—*he is a man.*"

The Duke had fallen into the habit of breaking through the silences when each man, following his own thoughts, would forget the other. And remarks such as these his companion knew, referred in sense and detail to the long talks whose intenser personalities had ceased.

This day Westboro' brought out his little paragraph as, between the hedges of a lowland lane, the two rode at a walk after a long hard canter from Penhaven, some eight miles behind them on the hill. On either side the top of the thorn was veiled with rime. Down the hedge's thickness from his seat on his horse, Bulstrode could look into the dark tangled interstices of the thicket and its delicious browns and greens. Into the thorns here and there dried leaves had fallen, and from the hedge as well as from the country, clouded and gray with mist, came a sharpened sweetness; a blended smell of fields over which early winter had passed; a smell of woods over which the fires cast smoky veils. In the freshness and with the eager exercise, Bulstrode's cheeks had reddened. He sat his horse well, and his enjoyment of life, his ease with it, his charming spirit, shone in the face he turned to the Duke. For some miles given over to the sympathetic task of managing his horse, he had enjoyed like a boy, and during the ride had thought of nothing but the physical delight of the open air and the motion.

"Yes," he returned to his friend's remark, "as far as any point of interest goes, we may grant you that we began as men. I mean to say that monkeys aren't useful in one's deductions for emotional hypotheses, at any rate. I'll grant you for our use that we were men to begin with."

"Damn it all," said his host, "aren't we just as much so to-day, for all our civilization?"

"Well, we don't primarily knock on the head a woman whose physique has pleased us, and carry her off while she's unconscious."

"It might in some cases be a good thing if we did," Westboro' growled.

Bulstrode ran his hand along the silky neck of his horse, from whose nostrils smoke came in

little puffs that met the moisture of the air.

"Oh, we're not, you know, so awfully far away from our instincts in anything, old man! There isn't any cast-iron rule about feelings. They depend on the individual."

"Oh, you've never married," Westboro' tried frankly to irritate him, "and you can't, you know ___"

The sweet temper of the other accepted the Duke's scorn. "I'm not married, or very theoretical about it, either. One can only, after all, have his own point of view."

"We're not, I expect, fair to the women," the Duke generously acknowledged. "We look for so much in them. We expect them to be so much."

"A wife," Bulstrode completed for him, "a mother, a friend."

And Westboro' finished it. "For them and for other men. And a mistress."

And here Bulstrode took him up for the first time with a note of challenge in his voice.

"And what, my dear man, did you intend that the Duchess should take you for? No, I mean to say, quite man to man, given that any woman could or does contain all the qualities you so temperately ask?"

Westboro' smiled at the first curtness he had ever heard in his friend's voice.

"Oh, you know, we men don't fuss about ourselves."

"You married her at eighteen," Bulstrode said. "You made her a Duchess. You had already lived a life and she was a child beside you in experience. You required motherhood of her, and in return...."

"Well," Westboro' turned about in his saddle and faced his earnest friend. "What then, in your opinion, might I have been?"

"You might have been from the start," Bulstrode said it shortly, "a lover. It's not a bad rôle. We Anglo-Saxons have no sentimental education. Our puritanism makes us half the time timid at courtship and love."

The gentlemen rode a little on with slackened rein. Westboro's eyeglass cord was almost motionless as he stared out between his horse's ears down the lane.

"Perhaps, after all," he fetched it out slowly, "there's something in what you say."

Whether or not there was any truth in Bulstrode's commonplace remark, it lingered in his host's mind all day. It gave him, for the first time, a link to follow—an idea—and the Duke, entirely unused to analysis, accustomed to act if not on impulse, certainly according to his will and pleasure without concession, harked back in a groping, touching fashion like an awkward boy looking for a lost treasure, upsetting, as he went, old haunts, turning over things for years not brought to the light of day. And it took him all the afternoon and a good part of the evening to reach the place where he thought he had lost originally his joy. Unlike the happier boy, he could not seize his bliss once recovered, and stow it away; it was only remembrance that brought him back, and with a tightening heart as he realized once more the form and quality of his lost happiness—there he must leave it and see it fade again into the past.

Jimmy gave his host a chance to follow his absorbed reflections. He effaced himself, and behind a book whose lightness of touch made him agreeably forget the heavier hand of current and daily events, he sat in his dressing-room reading "The Vicar of Wakefield."

When Westboro' came in to him Jimmy looked up and quoted aloud: "When lovely woman stoops to folly and finds at length that men betray...."

"Oh, they console themselves quickly," Westboro' finished. "Don't fancy anything else, my dear fellow, they console themselves."

"They may pretend to do so."

"They succeed."

Westboro' took the little book from his friend's hand and shut it firmly as if afraid that the rest of the verse might slip out and refute him.

"Bulstrode, she consoles herself, she is perfectly happy."

"How are you then so sure?"

"Oh, I hear of her in Paris." The Duke's features contracted. "She's contriving to pass her

time—to pass her time."

Bulstrode leaned over towards his friend and, for Westboro' sat opposite him, he put his hand on the Duke's knee.

"You must certainly go to her."

Westboro' stroked his moustache before he answered:

"Not if I never see her again."

"You should decidedly go to her."

The other shook his head. "Not if it meant twice the hell it is now."

"Why not?"

"I went to her once. I may say twice," he slowly said, "since we separated." And as he stopped speaking Bulstrode could only imagine what the result had been.

"I don't think I'm a Westboro' really, for I couldn't follow any woman's carriage puling like a schoolboy as my ancestor did. There's a great deal of my mother's blood in me, and it's a different blend."

Bulstrode's eyes were on the little book between the Duke's aristocratic hands.

"She has, I grant you, a lot to forgive; but she quite well knows all the blame I acknowledge, quite well. I don't believe I'm any worse than the run of mankind, and whether I am or not, I've made all the amends I can and I have nothing more to say."

His eyeglass had dropped; his face looked worn; he showed his age more than a happier man would have done at his years His mood of thinking it out by himself continued for so long that Bulstrode finally asked:

"What, if I may be so near you as to question, do you mean, old chap, to do?"

Westboro' had it all laid out for himself—his ready answer showed it.

"You say I'm not a lover," he reminded his friend; "no doubt you're right, but I'm an affectionate chap, at any rate, I can't bear this—" He looked about hopelessly. The words were forced out by the high mark of his unhappiness: "—this infernal solitude. Even when a good comrade like yourself is in it, the house seems to speak to me from the empty rooms in this wing." (Bulstrode knew he was thinking of the nurseries with the low latches and little gates.) "I can't stand it. When I get out of England and abroad the place fetches me back again like a magnet. I'm a home-keeping sort of man, and I want my home."

His friend gently urged in the silence: "Well?"

"I shall wait," the Duke went on with the plan he had been forced to make out for himself. "I shall hold on, keep along a bit, and then—*I shall go to the other woman.*" And the Duke, as he raised his eyes to his companion, fixed his glass firmly and felt that he challenged in every way Bulstrode's disapproval. "The Duchess will get her divorce—it goes without saying—will get her divorce. Why she has not already done so I can't imagine."

As Westboro' appeared inclined to leave the subject there, Bulstrode pressed him further: "And then?"

"I fancy I shall marry the other woman."

Bulstrode started. The complexion of the idea was so foreign to him that he could not for a moment let himself think that he understood it.

"You will," he said, "marry one woman whilst you distinctly love another?"

The Duke nodded. "Love," he reflected, "I begin to believe I don't know anything about. It must, of course, suppose some sort of return. If, as you say, I love another woman, I'm not made of the stuff that can go along doing so without anything on her side."

The dressing clock at the bedside on the little stand chimed the hour. It was two o'clock. The Duke of Westboro' rose.

"You must think me a colossal ass, my dear friend, but if it had not been for your awfully good companionship and your kindness, I dare say that by now I should have already made some sort of fatal blunder."

At the door Bulstrode put his hand on his friend's arm, and, as though nothing in the conversation apart from the Duchess had any real significance, he said simply:

"You are then, in sum, simply waiting...?"

"Oh, yes," agreed the other rather blankly. And the other man knew that he had been told only half the thought in his friend's mind.

"She may get a divorce at any time, you know, quite easily, without my taking any further steps."

"Oh, I see perfectly," Jimmy accepted; and as the door closed after his host, he said, almost aloud: "He thinks, then, there is half a chance that the Duchess will return." And wondering very much how far a woman is willing to sacrifice herself for a man, granted that she loves him, he did not finish his phrase.

The next day Bulstrode, no longer able to resist the beckoning country, went out, as it were, to it as if he said "Here I am—what will you do with me?"

If Gloucestershire could, for a while, make him forget the problems he had been housed with, brush him up a bit, he thought it would be a good thing. Therefore, when his horse came up to the door he threw himself on the animal in a nervous haste to be gone, and setting off in the direction of Penhaven, obeyed its summons at last.

Westboro' had run up to London for overnight, and Bulstrode, at the Duke's something more than invitation, a sort of appeal, was to stay indefinitely on. It must be confessed that he rather selfishly looked forward to the course of an untroubled afternoon, to an evening amongst the books whose files had tempted him for days.

But the pity of all he had sympathetically been closeted with was great in his mind. Whereas his native delicacy and slow judgment had led him to keep silent until now towards his host, it was in no wise because Jimmy had not quite made up his mind that he would not spare Westboro' at all when the moment, if it ever came, should present itself for him to speak.

As he rode along he thought of the Duchess naturally in Paris, surrounded by a train of ardent admirers; she had them always, everywhere. She was disillusioned, of course, probably angry, piqued, and unfortunately she had been betrayed; and he shrugged with a gentle desperation as he made a mental picture of the last scene: the inevitable divorce, the wrecking of another household, unless—unless—one of them loved sufficiently to save the situation.

His thoughts came to a standstill as his horse stopped short before a gate: his riding had fetched him up before it. The mare stretched out her long neck, set free by a relaxing rein; she sniffed the latch and put her head over the wicket, and the rider saw that they had come across fields, and were at the entrance of a deserted property. The gate gave access to a forest road where the thick underbrush was untidy, and on whose walk the piles of leaves lay as they had fallen. He could see no farther in, and thinking to come at the end upon a forsaken garden, the precincts of an untenanted country house, he leaned down, tried the gate which fairly swung into his hand, and the mare passed through. There was the delicious intimacy about the woods which the sense of coming alone and unexpectedly upon the old and forsaken gives the traveller. He is a discoverer of secrets, a legitimate spy upon stories which he flatters himself he is the first to read. He becomes intimate with another man's past, and as he must necessarily, in all ignorance, tell himself his own tales, indiscretion may be said to be a doubtful quantity.

A bit back in the bare brown woods he saw the flash of a marble pillar; it shone white and clear in the setting of russet and against the boles of the trees. A little farther away gleamed another figure on its base of fluted marble, and still farther along, leaf-overlaid and thus effaced, he could discern the contour of a sunken garden. The place grew more pretentious as he slowly picked his way, and he was unprepared for coming suddenly onto a gravel path from which he thought the leaves had been blown away. Here Bulstrode dismounted, and, with the bridle over his arm, walked towards the path's end, pleasantly interested, and now, as he thought it should by this do, the house struck on him through an archway contrived by the training of old trees over a circle of stone. The house broke on him in the shape of an Elizabethan manse; long and old with soft rose-color of brick in places, and the color of a faded leaf in others where the dampness had soaked in and had, through countless mid-summer suns, been burned out again. Before the windows flashed the red of bright curtains. The house was distinctly, and he thought it seemed happily, occupied. He stopped where he stood by the arch, a little confused and a little balked in his romantic treat, and not the less feeling himself an intruder. But before he could turn his horse and unobtrusively lead her back the way they had come, the house's occupant, no doubt she who gave it the air of being so happily tenanted, had come out with a garden hat on her head, a pair of garden shears in her hands, and with the precision of intention, turned sharply towards the arched forest walk, and in this way squarely upon Bulstrode.

The surprise to him was, without doubt, the greater, for she knew him at once, and he for a second did not recognize her. Her extreme English air—the straw hat tied under her chin and the face it framed, so decidedly altered, bewildered him. His first greeting, mentally, before he spoke aloud to her, was masculine. "Why, her beauty! What in heaven's name had she done with it?"

"*What* are you doing here?"

They both asked it at once, and the lady having lived so long in an insular country was adept

in its possibilities of great hospitality as well as of freezing out an unwelcome visitor. She froze the poor gentleman and then, touched by his utter bewilderment and his innocence of wilful intrusion, she smiled more humanly.

"Won't you, since you *are* here, Mr. Bulstrode, come in and have a cup of tea?"

She at once followed their mutual question by saying: "As for being here, you will admit that given the part of the country it is, no one has a better right!"

"Oh, I'll admit anything you like," he laughed, "if you'll only admit us. You see we are two."

The lady came up to him in a more friendly manner; she gave him her hand and she really smiled beautifully. Then she put her hand on the nose of the horse, with the touch one has for familiar things.

"She's a perfect dear, isn't she—a dear. So you are riding her then? Well, you'll find her easy to tie, she stands well. There's nothing she can spoil, that's the charm of such an old, tumble-down place."

As Bulstrode followed after the trailing dress just touching the gravel with a rustling sound, he had the feeling of being suddenly, willy-nilly, taken and put into the heart of a story book. He smiled. "Well, I've done the first chapter and now I've got to go on in the book, I suppose, whether I want to be here or not, to the end."

"I thought I was making a voyage of discovery," he told her as they sat in the low room before a fire and before her table and tea cups. "I fancied I was the only person within miles round. I expect no one has a right to be so bold, but I really didn't dream the place was lived in, as, of course, you know."

"Drink your tea," she bade, "and eat your toast before I make you tell me if you have come to see me as a messenger."

"And if I have?"

It was delicious tea, and the American of her had somehow found cream for it, which, un-English luxury, the American in him fully appreciated. The liquid in the blue-and-white cups was pale as saffron and the toast was a feather.

"At five o'clock there's nothing like it in the world," he breathed. "I didn't hope for this to-day. I had recklessly thrown five o'clock over, for I'm alone at the castle." He drank his tea, finished, and with a sigh. Then he said: "I can actually venture to ask you for another cup, for I am nobody's messenger or envoy, my dear, nobody's. I'm just an indiscreet, humdrum individual who has been too charmingly rewarded for an intrusion. You saw my surprise, didn't you? And I'm not very clever at putting on things."

The Duchess tacitly accepted, it is to be supposed, for she made him a second cup of tea, slowly.

"You don't know that I've been thinking about you all day," he said, "and I can frankly say that I've been making a very different picture of you indeed."

She took no notice whatsoever of his personality.

"You are in England, then," she said rather formally. "I never think of my own country people as being here. I always think of Americans as being in the States, men above all, for they fit so badly in the English atmosphere, don't they? It's always incongruous to me to hear their "r"s" and "a"s" rattling about in this soft language. It's horrid of me to speak so. You, of course, are out of the category. But as you stood there, with Banshee's nose over your shoulder you fitted quite beautifully in with everything. I don't believe I should mind you, ever, anywhere, and yet I more naturally think of you at Newport, don't you see?"

Her companion cried: "Oh, no, I'm in England, and you can't alter the fact, at least if you can, please don't; for Newport on the fifteenth of December, and with no such tea or fire——"

"Oh," she permitted, "you may stay. I said you fitted—only——"

Bulstrode interposed: "Don't at least for a few moments entertain any 'buts' and 'onlys'—they are nearly as bad as those magical travelling trunks that would transport me to the United States. It is so—let me say—neutral in this place, I should think I might remain. I don't know why you are here or with whom, nor for how long, or for how deep, but it is singularly perfect to have found you."

His hostess had left her seat behind the table, and taking a chair by the fireside where Bulstrode was sitting, undid the ribbons of her garden hat and let the basket-like object fall on the floor.

"You must promise me, first of all, that you will not say you have seen me. Otherwise I shall leave here to-morrow and nobody shall ever again know where I am."

However her command might conflict with what was in his mind, he was obliged to give her his word. He had no right not to do so.

"And nothing," she said, "must make you break this promise, Mr. Bulstrode. I know how good you are, and how you do all sorts of Quixotic funny things, but in this case please—please——"

"Mind my own business?" he nodded. "I will, Duchess, I will."

She looked at him steadily a moment and seemed satisfied, for she relaxed the tenseness of her manner, which was the first Americanism she had displayed, and in her pretty soft drawl asked him, with less perfunctory interest than her words implied: "You are at Westboro'?"

"Yes, since the twenty-fifth."

"And you're staying on?"

"I seem to be more or less of a fixture—until the holidays, I expect."

"Lucky you," she breathed, and at his expression of candid surprise she half laughed. "Oh, I mean as far as the castle goes—isn't it really too delightful?"

He was able to say honestly: "Quite the most beautiful house I have ever seen."

"Yes, I think so too," she nodded. "It's not so important as many others but it's more perfect, more like a home."

Bulstrode sat back in his chair and tried to make her forget him. Between the fire and the shadow he wanted to watch her face from which he now saw that the beauty he remembered had not faded but had been transformed. She was beautiful in another way: the brilliant, blooming girl, fully blown at eighteen, with the dazzling charm of health, no longer existed in the Duchess of Westboro'. She had refined very much indeed. The aggressive bearing of the American princess had been replaced by the colder, more serene hauteur of the English Duchess. She was evidently a very proud woman, the arch of her brows said so, and the line of her lips. All her lines were sharper and finer. Her color, and he could not, as he studied her, quite regret it; her color was quite gone. Her pallor made her more delicate, and her eyes—it was in them that Bulstrode thought he saw the greatest change of all; they were now fixed upon him, there was something melancholy in their profound and deeply circled gray.

"What rooms will they have given you?" she asked after a moment. Then—"Wait," she commanded, "I know. The south wing, the Henry IV. rooms that look into the gardens. I always gave those to the men. There's something extremely homelike about them, don't you think so? And have you ever seen anything like those winter roses in that court? Did any bloom this year? The trellis runs up along the terrace balustrade—or possibly you don't care for flowers? Of course you wouldn't as a girl does."

A *girl*—with that face and those eyes? Why, she must have been talking back ten years. Bulstrode drew a breath.

"I know the roses you mean. It would be difficult to forget them. Your gardener takes such pride in them. For some reason they are never gathered; they fall as they hang. The gardener, it so happened, told me so."

She was looking at him with an intensity almost painful, but she said nothing further, and after a moment more Bulstrode replied to another question.

"As it happens I don't occupy the Henry IV. rooms. I have mine quite on the other side of the castle. Don't they call them the 'West Rooms'?"

She caught her breath a little, but she was in splendid training with all her years of English life behind her. Her face, nevertheless, showed how well she knew those rooms, without the added note in her voice as she said:

"Oh, those West Rooms—you have those."

And in the quiet that fell as her eyes sought the fire, he quite knew how her thoughts travelled down the hall to the open nursery doors with their waiting gates. Whatever were her reasons for being here, Bulstrode saw that he had surprised her in a moment of sadness, and that his visit in spite of his indiscretion, was not wholly unwelcome. But in the sudden way coming upon some one connected with her own life, she had been completely taken unawares, and her lapse into something like sentiment was short. Even as he looked at her she hardened.

"You have naturally not asked me anything, Mr. Bulstrode," she said, coldly enough now, "and more naturally still I have no explanations to give. By to-morrow I may be gone. I may live here for the rest of my life. I never leave my garden, I am quite unknown to the people about. If any one in Westboro' learns that I am here I shall leave at once. You will not come again. It is discourteous to say so—to ask it."

He had risen from his chair.

"Oh, but it's quite, quite dark. However will you manage?"

"We'll pick our way back well enough," he assured her. "The distance to the road is nothing, and from here on it runs straight to the abbey."

The Duchess followed him slowly to the door, and there she asked abruptly: "Is Westboro' to be down all winter? I didn't know it. I thought he was out of England or I should not have come here at all."

"Oh," Bulstrode answered, "he's too restless to be long anywhere. I expect he'll pack up and be off before we know it. He's away just now at any rate, and I'm kicking my heels up there quite alone. I'm not to return—ever?" he ventured. "You may so fully trust me that—" and he saw that she hesitated and pursued, "I shall ride up to the little gate again, and if it is unlatched...."

"Oh, don't count on it," she advised him, "don't—it's against all my plans."

Somebody in the shape of a lad had unfastened the mare, and preceded Bulstrode on foot with a lantern, by whose flicker, with much delicate caution and pretended shyness, Banshee picked her way to the road, through the woods which Bulstrode an hour before had fancied led into a deserted garden.

"You see," he put it to her delicacy to understand, "it's scarcely, in a way, fair to him—I feel it so at least. It gives me the sensation of knowing more than he does in his own house about that which presumably should be Westboro's secret."

"You mean to say,"—the Duchess pinned him down, "that you'll give me away because of one of those peculiar crises of honor that makes a person betray a trust in order to salve his conscience?"

Bulstrode had come again faithfully, making the pilgrimage to the forest road, and he was not surprised that it should have finally turned out so that one day the gate yielded to his touch, and he found the Duchess if not waiting for him, distinctly there. During their delightful little talks—and they had been so—not once had the name of Bulstrode's host been mentioned; and if the lady had a curiosity concerning her lord and once master, she did not display it to the visitor.

"I mean to say," Bulstrode replied in answer to her challenge which was fiery, "that I really don't want to play false to Westboro', more false than I shall in the course of events be forced to be. Of course, your secret—I need not say so—is entirely safe. But the Duke comes back in a day or two, and rather than face him with this silence which you have imposed upon me I am going back to London before he returns."

The sewing she had chosen to finger—a Duchess, and an American one at that, is not expected to do more—lay at her feet. By her side was a basket of considerable proportions, and it was full to the brim with linen: the very fine white stuff overflowed from the basket like snow. The Duchess of Westboro's handiwork had already caught the eye of her guest. And now, as her long hands and her long finger, tipped by its golden thimble, handled her sewing, Bulstrode watched her interestedly and found great loveliness in her bending face.

"I didn't think any of you knew how to sew," he mused aloud.

"Any of us!" she smiled. "Do you, by that, mean American Duchesses? Or do you mean women who have left their husbands? Or in just what class do you think of me, regarding your last remark?"

She folded up her work and dropped her thimble in the nest of snow. Bulstrode acknowledged that his conclusion, whatever it had been, was wrong.

"When I married," the Duchess said, "I was the best four-in-hand whip for a woman in my set. I don't think I am a keen needlewoman, really, and I know then I didn't recognize a needle by sight. When my little boys were born I sent to Paris for everything they wore, and I can remember that I didn't even know for what the little clothes were intended, many of them, when they came home in my first son's layette. I have learned to sew since I came here to The Dials. I've been three months here, now, and I really must have proved a clever pupil, for I assure you that they tell me I have made some pretty things." As she spoke she held up the seam she ran, and Bulstrode, who himself confessed to not knowing a needle by sight, was forced to peer over the seam and endeavor to find her tiny stitches. He exclaimed:

"Three months! You must have been terribly dull!"

"No."

"You are known," he said, "throughout the countryside—not that I've been making inquiries, but in spite of myself I have heard—as a stranger, presumably a Frenchwoman, a widow who will probably buy The Dials."

"Oh, I shall never buy the place," she assured him, and then abruptly: "Had you been free to speak of me, what would you have told Westboro'?"

He waited a second, then answered her lightly, but with a feeling which she did not mistake: "I should have asked him to come and see you run up that seam."

"He would not have come."

Remembering very clearly how determined Westboro's decision had been, he did not affirm to the lady his belief that Westboro' would in reality have flown to her.

At the door, later, she bade him good-bye and appeared to gather her courage together, and, with a lapse into a simplicity so entire that she seemed only Frances Denby and to possess no more of title or distinction than any lovely woman, she said to him:

"Mr. Bulstrode, please don't leave the castle."

"Oh, I couldn't sit opposite my friend at dinner, I couldn't meet his eyes now, my dear child."

The Duchess touched his arm. "It's sweet of you to call me so. You are really as young as I am, and certainly I feel an age beyond you. Please stay."

The pleasure which his visits had been to her had brought something of an animation and interest to her cold face. Dressed in a dark and simple gown, her fur stole about her neck, she had this afternoon followed him out of the house into the garden and walked slowly along by his side towards the gate.

"Of all the people in the world one would choose you, I think, to be the friend of..." She caught herself up. "I mean to say, can't you forget those stupid little ideas of honor and friendship and all that?" She put it beautifully. "I, of course, will give up seeing you," she renounced, "but it will be a world of comfort just to feel that you are there."

As he did not at once succumb to her blandishments, she asked point blank:

"Promise me to stop on."

"I at least won't go without letting you know of it."

"Without my permission?"

"I won't say that."

"But I'm sure that you mean it," she nodded happily, "and you're *such* a help."

She was so affectionate as she bade him good-bye, that only at the little road did he begin to wonder just what help he was. Was he aiding her to detective poor Westboro'? Was he adding an air of protection to some feminine treachery?

"Oh, no," he decided; "she's incapable of any thing of the sort. But I must clear out;" and he decided that at once, so soon as Westboro' should be at home, he would take himself to ground still more neutral than The Dials had proved to be. But Westboro' showed no intention of coming immediately home. Instead, with a droll egoism, as if the fact that he had made poor Bulstrode a party to his unhappiness gave him thereafter a right to the other's time even in absence, he laid a firm hold on Jimmy. Westboro' finally put pen to paper, and the scrappy letter touched the deserted visitor; it proved to have been written at a *bureau de poste* in Paris:

"Don't, for God's sake, go off, old man. Keep up your end." (His end!) "Stop on at Westboro'—Use the place as if it were all put up for your amusement. Just live there so I may feel it's alive. Let me find a human being at home when I turn up. I'll wire in a day or so."

"So he is in Paris, then." Bulstrode had supposed so, and did not doubt that the Duke had gone there to find news of his wife, possibly as well to see Madame de Bassevigne.

Poor fellow, if he were searching for the Duchess! Well, Bulstrode would keep up his end, he had nothing else for the time being to do but to mind other people's business. He put it so to himself. Indeed he could not but believe it was fortunate for more than one person that something could keep him from minding his own.

An undefined discretion kept him from going to the Moated Grange, as to himself he styled the retreat the Duchess had made of The Dials. And, in spite of the absolute freedom now given him to prowling amongst the books, in spite of his "evenings out" as he called them, Jimmy found the time at Westboro' to drag lamentably. His own affairs, which he so faithfully denied, came to him in batches of letters whose questions could not be solved by return mail. He became over his own thoughts restless, and he sent a telegram to his host: "Better have a look at things here yourself. Can't possibly stop on longer than..." And he set a day.

"If Westboro', poor devil, has to look forward to a life of this unaccompanied grandeur," he pitied him. The lines and files of soft-footed, impersonal servants, the perfect stilted attention,

the silence, and the inhumanness of a man's lonely life, became intolerable to Jimmy Bulstrode. Even though Frances, Duchess of Westboro', had truly said that the castle was a delightful home, Bulstrode began to wonder what that word comprised or meant: certainly nothing like his occupation of another man's house or like any life that is lived alone.

At the end of the week that the American spent at Westboro' he had condensed the castle, as he said to himself, as far as possible, to the proportions of a Harlem flat, and he lived in it. In the almost small breakfast room whose windows gave on the terrace, and where all the December sun that was visible came to find him, he took his meals; each of them but dinner, which was determinedly and imperially served by five men in one of the dining-rooms, and at which function, as he expressed it, he shut his eyes and just ate blindly through. He lived out of doors all day, took his tea in his dressing-room, and read and smoked until the august dinner hour called him down to dress and dine alone. For a week he lived "without sight of a human being," so he said, for the domestics were only machines. And, towards the end of the week, he would have gone to see any one: an enemy would have been too easy, and the only person within range was, of course, the Duchess of Westboro'.

Westboro' had made a confidant of Bulstrode, and the woman had not. Bulstrode liked it in her. To be sure, the cases were quite different: there was no reason why the man deserted and bruised in his pride and in his heart, should not have talked to his old friend. Westboro' accused himself of weakness.

"I've blabbed like a woman," he acknowledged ruefully.

The Duchess had not spoken nor had she, on the other hand, with the fine courage of the true woman, been in any eager haste to discover what her husband had said of her, nor had she asked if he had spoken at all. On the other hand, aided by an extreme patience and with still greater delicacy, she had waited, understanding that her guest, whose mettle and character she knew would not permit him to betray a trust, might, however naïvely, disclose what he knew without being conscious of it.

But if Bulstrode gave himself or his host away, the Duchess made no sign that she had profited by indiscretions. The impersonality of their conversations was indeed a relief to Bulstrode, and it made it possible for him to feel himself less a traitor at the Duke's hearth. But she talked very sweetly, too, of her children. She had the second picture to the Duke's of the little boys, a picture like the one Bulstrode had seen at the castle, and showed it to him as the father had done.

"Westboro' has the companion to this," he had not minded telling her as they sat together in the small room he had grown to know as well as the larger rooms of the castle. And at the end of a few moments Bulstrode quite blurted out: "Why, in Heaven's name do you women make men suffer so?"

The Duchess, who had been working, dropped her bit of muslin and looked, with her cherry lips parted and her great serious eyes, for all the world like a lady in a gift book. Her face was eighteenth century and child-like.

Bulstrode nodded. "Oh, yes, you've got so easily the upper hand, the very least of you, you know, over the best of us. It's such an unfair supremacy. You've got such a clever knowledge of little things, such a sense of the scale of the feelings, and you certainly make the very most of your power over us all. Can't you—" and his eyes, half serious and half reproachful, seemed, as he looked at her, to question all the womankind he knew—"Can't you ever love us well enough just quite simply to make us happy?"

The Duchess had taken up her sewing again, and her eyes were upon it. Bulstrode waited for a little, following her stitches through the muslin and the flash of her thimble in the light.

"Can't you?" he softly repeated. "Isn't it, after all, a good sort of way of spending one's life, this making another happy?"

"American women aren't taught so, you know," she said. "It isn't taught us that the end and aim of our existence is to make a man happy."

Her companion didn't seem at all surprised.

"And so you see," she went on, "those of us that do learn that after all there may be something in what you say—those of us that learn, only find it out after a lot of hard experiences, and it is sometimes too late!"

She seemed to think his direct question called for a distinct answer, for she admitted: "Oh, yes, of course there are some of us who would give a great deal to try. And you see, moreover," she went on with her subject as she turned the corner of her square, "you put it well when you said 'love enough.' You see that's the whole thing, Mr. Bulstrode, to love enough. One can, of course, in that case, do nearly all there is to do, can't one?"

"Nearly all," he had smiled, and added: "*And a great deal more.*"

The household gods, whose dignity and harmony had not been disturbed during the absence of the master of Westboro', were unable, however, to give him very much comfort on his return. The Duke's motor cut quickly up the long drive and severed—clove, as it were—a way through the frosty air and let him into the park. The poor man had only a sense of wretchedness on coming home—"coming back," he now put it. Huddled down deep in his fur coat, its collar hunched round his ears, his face was as gloomy as that of a man dispossessed of all his goods; doors thrown open into the fragrant and agreeably warmed halls fetched him further home. But the knowledge that the house had been lived in during his absence was not ungrateful. He sniffed the odor of a familiar brand of cigar, and before he had quite plumbed the melancholy of the place to its depths, Jimmy Bulstrode had sunned out of one of the inner rooms, and the grasp of the friendly hand and the sound of the cheerful voice struck a chord in Westboro' that shook him.

"I've been like a fiend possessed," he said to Jimmy, in the evening when they found themselves once more before the fire. "I've scarcely known what I've been doing, or why; but I know one thing, and that is that I'm the most wretched man alive."

Bulstrode nodded. "You *did* go to Paris, then!"

"Yes," said the Duke, "and what I've found out there has driven me insane."

Although ignorant of the variations of his friend's discovery, Bulstrode was pretty certain of one that had not been made.

"You may, old chap," he said smoothly, "not have found out all the truth, you know."

Westboro' raised his hand. "Come," he said, "no palliations; you can't smooth over the facts. Frances is not in Paris. She has not been in Paris for several months." He paused.

"In itself not a tragedy," murmured his friend. "Paris is considered at times a place as well *not* to be in."

But Bulstrode's remark did not distract his friend from his narrative.

"She has not been in Paris since I saw her twelve months ago, and she has left no sign or trace of where she has gone. There is no address, no way that I can find her. Not that a discovery is not of course ultimately possible, but what, in the interval, if I should wish to write to her? What if I should need to see her? What if I should die?"

"Would you, in any of those cases, send for her?"

"I don't know," the Duke admitted.

"But," Jimmy asked him, "did you go to Paris this time to see the Duchess?"

"Since you ask me frankly," the Duke admitted, "I don't think that I did."

"At all events," the other said, "you surely did not go to spy on her, Westboro'?"

The Duke was silent, then answered quietly:

"I should never ask a question—not if it meant a certain discovery of something that I feared or suspected. I don't think I should ever seek to find out something she didn't want me to know."

Bulstrode, at the blindness of a man regarding his own intentions, smiled behind his cigar. "Well?" he helped.

"I went over to France," said the Duke—"and I suppose you'll scarcely believe a man who you say is not a lover to be capable of such sentimentality—simply, if possible, to have a sight of my wife, to see her go out of the door, or to see her go in, to see her possibly get into a carriage; and how did I know that it would not be with another man?"

"How did you find out that she had left?"

"I asked for her at her hôtel."

"The first question, then," Jimmy smiled.

"A fair one?"

"Oh, perfectly."

"I was told that the Duchess had left Paris months before."

"And then?" the other man's voice was placid as he spoke for the Duke. "Then you went to her bankers, her bakers and candlestick makers; in short, you asked all over the place, didn't you?"

The Duke swore gently. "Well, what would you have a man do?"

"Why I would have him do that," nodded Jimmy, "by all means. Any man would have done so."

In the half second of interval whilst the Duke was obliged to swallow his friend's sarcasm, Bulstrode had time to think: "Here I am, once more in the heart of an intrigue. Its fetters are all about me and I am wretchedly bound by honor not to do the simple, natural thing." Then he asked boldly: "Well, what do you think about it, Westboro'?"

"Think?" Westboro' repeated, "why, that she has deliberately escaped from me, put herself out of any possible reach; she doesn't want a reconciliation and she has gone away. She may have gone away alone and she may not, that I don't know, and I don't believe I want to know."

"Oh, you'll find her." It was with the most delightful security and contentment that his friend was able to tell the Duke this. But the cheerful note struck the poor husband the disagreeablest of blows.

"Gad!" he laughed, "what a cold brand of creature a bachelor is! 'Find her!' as one might speak of finding an umbrella that you've left by mistake at your club. Of course she can be found. There are not many mysteries that search can't solve in these days. And Duchesses don't drop off the face of the earth. I could no doubt have found her in twenty-four hours, but I didn't try to. I don't know that I want to find her. It isn't the fact of where she's gone that counts—that she wanted to go—that she has voluntarily made the separation final and complete."

"Then," persisted the bachelor, "you don't really *want* to find her?"

"Jove!" the Duke turned on him. "You don't know what it is to love a woman! You've got some imagination—try to use it, can't you? Can't you?"

He met the American's handsome eyes. A flush rose under Bulstrode's cheek. Westboro' put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "I beg your pardon, dear old chap."

"Oh, that's all right, old chap," Bulstrode assured cheerfully.

"My dear Duchess, it seems an unconscionable waste of time and life for any one to ignore the inevitable! It's such a prodigal throwing out of the window of riches!"

Bulstrode took her hands, both of them, in his as she stood in the winter sunshine, the open house door behind her, the terrace and its broken stairs of crumbling stone before her.

"Why, my dear lady, if I kept a diary of daily events I couldn't write down one page of good reasons why you should be living here and Westboro' up there, and I a comic go-between, in the secret of both and the confidence of one."

"Oh," she interrupted, "then you're in the confidence...?"

"Of your husband, yes," Bulstrode found himself startled into betrayal.

She drew her hands from him and walked on a little in the sunshine, and he followed by her side.

"I don't mind," she permitted, "you're such a perfect dear. I shouldn't mind at all if I thought that the confidence were a good one."

Her tone was light and cool, but the gentleman never failed to notice when the Duchess spoke of the Duke that there was a tremor under her words, a warmth, an agitation, which she vainly tried to control.

"Confidences," she said, "are very rarely just, you know, and *les absents ont toujours tort*."

"Oh, you don't mean...?" Jimmy emphasized.

"It was a confidence, wasn't it?"

"A real one," she was assured.

"Well then, you'll keep it, of course."

She drew the stole up round her long fair neck; her delicate head came out of the soft fur like a flower. But before she could follow up her words Bulstrode said:

"You, of course, then know how he loves you."

He felt more than knew that she trembled, and he saw an instinctive gesture which he understood meant that he should be silent.

"You and I put it quite clearly, Mr. Bulstrode, the other day." Her voice was serene again. "If

only one cares enough—that's the necessary thing for every question."

"Well?"

She half shrugged, made a little motion with her white hands, and this answer said for her: "That is indeed the question, and I haven't solved it."

They stopped at the terraced walk. The low stones, dark and black, were filled in their interstices with fine lines of greenish moss. On the sunny corner the dial's shadow fell across the noon. The Duchess put her hand on the warmed stones.

"It's a heavenly day," she said, "I don't believe that the Riviera is warmer. I never have seen such an English December."

Her eyes, which had been fixed on the woods below the garden, now turned towards the house and rested on one of the upper windows where the sun fell on the little panes. The Duchess remained looking up a few seconds, then she came back to her guest.

"I started, you know, to tell you something," Bulstrode smiled at her. "I once served on a jury in the West, and although the case was a miserably sad one in every way, I suppose, I couldn't take it as seriously as I should have done, for from the first the whole thing seemed so unnecessary, and the crisis could so easily have been avoided."

"I know," she interrupted him, "but you're rather wrong. Not from the first."

He capitulated. "Well, grant it so if you like, only agree with me when I say from my own—he put his hand down on the dial's edge. "From this lovely noon-time on, every hour you waste is clear loss. The Duke loves you as women are rarely loved, and after all," he said with something like passion in his agreeable voice "what *do* you all expect? Love doesn't hang on every tree for a woman to pluck at will, and you have the great luck, my dear Duchess, to be loved by your own husband. Why don't you go to him?"

"Go to him?" she echoed.

He curtly replied: "Why not?"

"My dear friend!"

"Why, didn't you forbid him to go to you?"

"Ah," she nodded, "the confidence, it was intimate indeed. But since you have got it, won't you agree that any man, if he loved a woman, would disobey her?"

"Westboro' would not."

The Duchess said coldly: "Pride is not love."

"You didn't mean him, then, to keep his vow?"

"Yes," she slowly thought out, "I did indeed, with all my heart."

"And now?"

She turned towards the house again, and as she walked back, said: "I don't quite know."

And Bulstrode asked her: "That is why you are here, to find out?"

"Partly."

Her companion's face grew stern. The Duchess did not see it for her eyes had again swept the upper window. At her side Bulstrode went on: "You have taken ten years to discover that you did not love your husband. You have taken one year to begin to wonder, to doubt, to suspect, to half think that you do; it's an unstable state of heart, Duchess, terribly unstable."

The woman stopped short at his side, and now as she lifted up her eyes and saw him, was a little startled if not frightened at his expression.

"Unstable," she repeated, with a world of scorn in her voice. "How can you use that word to me, knowing the facts of the case?"

"Oh, a man," said Bulstrode rather impatiently, "is a worthless, wretched piece of mechanism altogether. I grant you that—utterly unworthy the love and confidence of any good woman. He is capable of all the vagaries and infidelities possible. We'll judge him so. But," he continued, "these wandering, vagrant derelicts have been known to tie fast, to find port, to drop anchor. They have even brought great riches and important treasure into harbor, fetched a world of good luck home. There's only one thing in the universe that can keep a man, Duchess, only one."

"Well?" she encouraged him.

"A woman's heart," he said deeply, "a woman's true tenderness; and it needs all that heart, all its love, all its patience and sacrifice to keep that man—all and forever."

He saw her bosom heave; she had thrown her fur off, as if its warmth stifled her. Vivid color had come into her face. Her pallor for the time was destroyed, and as she flashed a rebellious look at him, a look of revolt and selfhood, he seemed to see again the American girl—wilful, egotistical, spoiled—an imperious creature whose caprices had been opposed to the Duke's Anglo-Saxon temperament and national egoism.

At this moment, the window the Duchess looked towards opened part way: it was under the eaves and there must have been a dovecote near, for there came the soft sound of cooing like the call of a young bird. Possibly the gentle note reached the woman's hearing as well, for her face transcendently softened.

"I think," she said with evident effort to speak in a commonplace tone, "it would be quite futile to urge Cecil to come."

"Oh, I shan't advise him so."

Bulstrode's quick answer made her look at him in so much surprise that he went on to say: "I would not, in justice to him, in justice to the great love I have been permitted to see, advise him to come."

The Duchess, during the months of analysis, suffering and experience, had not admitted to herself that should her husband return she would receive him, nor had she decided as to quite how obdurate she would be, and she was curious at the attitude of this gentle friend. She naïvely asked:

"Why would you not advise him so?"

Bulstrode said, still continuing his pleasant sententiousness, "The woman's heart must be as stable as the man's is uncertain, and the man who comes back after such a separation must not find a woman who does not know her own mind. He must, on the contrary, find one who has no mind or will or life but his."

As he looked at the person to whom he spoke he was somewhat struck by the maternal look in her: he had never clearly discovered it before. Her breast from which the fur had fallen, as it rose and fell under her soft gown, was full, generous, and beautiful; even as he spoke in a certain accusation against her, she seemed to have altered.

"Westboro'," he said a little confused, "must come back to a woman, Duchess, to a woman—to a consoler. I wish I could express myself—almost to a mother—as well as to a wife."

The ardent color dyed her face again; her lips moved. She put out her hand towards him, and as he took it he understood that she wished him to bid her good-by and to leave her alone. He heard what she struggled to say:

"He must not come, he must not come."

"No," he accepted sadly for his friend, "No, he must not come."

Bulstrode had chosen those times for going to The Dials when his host was least likely to take note of his absence; but it happened that more than once the Duke missed him at just the wrong moment, and more than once had been given the direction in which Bulstrode's footsteps had turned.

One morning, during a talk with his agent, Westboro'—the map of the district before him—enquired what had ever been done with the property known as The Dials, and into whose hands the old place had fallen. It seemed that it had been let for some months to a foreigner, a widow, who lived there, and alone.

Westboro' considered the farms and forests, as they lay mapped out before him, at the extreme foot of the castle's parks. It was a little square of some fifty acres by itself; it had never interested him before.

How long did the lease run on? Did the agent know? He believed for another year.

The Duke gave instructions to have the property looked into, with a view to purchase. And as the man put up his papers, he vouchsafed to his employer:

"The present tenant is very exclusive; she sees nobody, has never, I believe, even been to the Abbey. An old gardener who has been kept on says the servants are all foreign."

The Duke gave only a tepid interest to the information which would have passed entirely from his mind had it not been for his next meeting with Jimmy Bulstrode.

As much to shake off the impression his last talk with the Duchess had left on his mind, as to prolong his exercise, Jimmy had gone down out of the garden and across the place on foot over the rough winter fields with their rimy furrows and their barren floors. As he made his way towards the bottom hedge, looking for a stile he knew would be there a little farther on, cutting an entrance out through the thorn to the road, he met Westboro', like himself, on foot, and with his hand upon the stile. The presence of the Duke where Bulstrode knew he was least thought to be, and where he was now sadly sure he was not opportune, made Jimmy stop short, troubled, and, not for a moment thinking that the fact of his being there *himself* was singular, he made his way determinedly through the stile. As he greeted his friend, his own demeanor was decidedly one which said: "Don't go on in that direction, follow rather out of the turnstile with *me*." And he led his friend rather brusquely down the bank, hitching his arm in Westboro's, forced him along with him into the road.

"I ran down here to look over these meadows," said Westboro'. "You seem yourself, in a way, to be pacing the land off!"

"Oh, I *love* cross-country walking," said Bulstrode warmly.

"You must," smiled the Duke, "to have cut off into those barren fields. Were you lost?" Westboro' stopped and looked back. "You must have come directly down through The Dials."

"*The Dials*?" the American helplessly repeated. "Do you mean the old house and garden?"

Bulstrode's manner and speech were rarely curt and evasive, but he seemed this time embarrassed and taken unawares. As the two men sat in the motor which waited for the Duke down the road, Westboro' fixed his glass in his eye and looked hard for a second at his friend. Bulstrode's cheerful face was distinctly disturbed.

"I'm thinking something of buying The Dials," Westboro', after a moment, said against the wind.

Poor Jimmy. If the house had not sufficiently up till now materialized out of his fancy as a possession, it declared itself at once, without doubt, as something he must look after. It was only a little bit of England, luckily——

"Well," he exclaimed, "to be frank, old man, I've, too, been thinking I should like to buy that property. You could surely spare me this little corner of Glouceshire."

"Spare it!" cried Westboro', "my dear chap, fancy how ripping to have you a landlord here! To catch and hold you so! We'll go over the whole place together. My agent shall put the matter through for you."

"Good God, no!" said Bulstrode, "don't let your man have wind of any such a deal. The place would go up like a rocket in price. If you really yourself care to withdraw as much as possible, that's the most you can do. But for God's sake keep off the place, like a good fellow."

Behind his long moustaches the Duke covered a smile, but he conciliated his agitated friend.

"I'll keep off the grass until the turf is all your own, my dear Bulstrode."

"Thanks!" said the other cordially, and sat back with a sigh of relief. "There," he reflected peacefully, "my presence is explained—it's quite perfect. I shall be a landowner in England. At all events, it's lucky the property is sympathetic. I'm glad I didn't get balled up in this affair in, let us say, *New Jersey*, and find myself forced to purchase the Hackensack Meadows.

"Did the old house look deserted?" asked the Duke wickedly.

"Oh, rather!" replied the other gentleman.

"Really!" wondered Westboro'. "Why, they tell me that it is let to a Donna Incognita—a foreign lady."

Bulstrode, whether at his own lie or at the shock of his companion's knowledge, blushed, and his friend saw him redden. And the Duke, in whom candor was a charm, stared at his friend, half-opened his mouth, and then sat speechless. The suggestiveness of the whole affair rushed over him so rapidly that he had not time to ask himself whether he credited his suspicions or not.

"Good heavens! *Jimmy* carrying on a vulgar intrigue in a simple country village!" He looked at the face of the man by his side, but Jimmy, leaning forwards, addressed some remark to the chauffeur, and showed no intention of meeting the Duke's eyes. If it were not a vulgar intrigue, what could it be? How difficult it grew to connect such a *liason* with his friend. But as he thought on, the Duke began to ask why, after all, should it be so extraordinary! Why should he suppose Jimmy so unlike the rest of his set? More scrupulous, more sinless than other men—than himself? He couldn't answer his own question, but he did so think of Bulstrode, and since his late house party had believed that Jimmy cared for Mrs. Falconer. The lady at The Dials was certainly not she.

Bulstrode, in the shadow of this delinquency, surrounded certainly in the mind of the Duke by

an atmosphere of intrigue, became very human, rather consolingly human. In their mutual intercourse the Duke had felt himself living in a clearer atmosphere than he usually breathed. Along by Bulstrode's mode of life, points of view and principles, his own life had seemed more mistaken than he had ever thought it to be. And although Jimmy had never breathed a word of criticism, he had felt himself judged by the man's just, though gentle codes.

By the time he had reached this point in his reflections the motor had stopped at one of the side doors of the castle.

"There is, of course, some perfectly proper explanation—" the Duke decided. It's a harmless flirtation, if any flirtation at all. Perhaps it's a beneficent bit of benevolence; at any rate it's Jimmy's own affair, and after all, he's going to *buy* the property—perhaps he's going to marry. Why not?

Ashamed to have placed his friend, if only momentarily, in an equivocal position, he turned about as they got out of the car and put an affectionate hand on the American's shoulder.

"Oh, I expect, old man, that you've got some wonderful scheme up your sleeve! You're going to be married and fetch your bride to The Dials."

Poor Bulstrode unfortunately echoed: "*Married!*" with a world of scorn in his tone. "My poor Westboro,' after what I've lately seen and heard here—forgive me if I say that for the time at least I'm not too sharply tempted."

"Since," he said as he greeted her, "you appear to be intending to live here forever, you'll welcome me when I come back from London. I'm coming back for Christmas, but if I don't run in before you'll understand, won't you, that it is because I simply haven't dared. Westboro' has already seen me cut across to this place."

The Duchess interrupted him. "Oh, in that case, I shall, of course, be obliged to move away." And to her great surprise Bulstrode quickly agreed with her.

"I should think it wise—not of course in the least knowing why you originally came."

She looked at him rather quizzically.

"You mean to say then that you don't really know?"

"Oh,"—he was truthful—"I have rather an idea, and I hope a more or less true one."

But the lady did not confess or in anywise help him. He went on to say:

"Your love for the castle couldn't, of course, long continue to keep you mewed up here; and you'll be shortly discovered. As far as your own interests are concerned it will be rather better to obtain the divorce as soon as possible."

"Oh, Mr. Bulstrode," she interposed, "don't misread me."

He nodded sagely. "On the contrary, I am translating you from sight, my dear Duchess. And you are decidedly in your right regarding the Duke."

She was so at his mercy that she hardly moved her lips, watching his face. And as Bulstrode lit the cigarette she permitted him, and took his seat before the tea things which she had set at his elbow, he went on to make out her case for her.

"He has quite spoiled your life. He has been a brute, and not in the least worth your——"

But the Duchess had dropped her tongs; they fell ringing on the hard-wood floor. She raised a scarlet face to him.

"It's a *piége*," she murmured, "an *autodafé*."

"No," he said quietly, "it's a plain truth. Westboro' has told me everything. I must think that he has done so. The man of me naturally condones him, and the friend in me is inclined to be lenient. But the justice and right, my dear Duchess, are all on your side."

"Oh, justice and right!" she dismissed, "only criminals need such words."

Bulstrode said coolly: "But Westboro' has been a criminal!"

"If he were," emphasized the Duchess, "didn't I forgive him?"

"Of course, you did, my dear," her friend agreed warmly, "how wonderfully, how beautifully, everyone knows. And he is all the more, therefore, dreadfully to be blamed."

She said passionately: "What do you mean, Mr. Bulstrode? How—why do you speak to me like this?"

Her extraordinary guest drank his tea with singular peace of mind.

"I think he is dreadfully to be blamed."

"But why should you tell it to me?"

"Why not?" he returned, his charming eyes on hers with the greatest tribute of affection and sympathy—"I've known you for years, I'm fond of you, you've been horribly wronged, and I'm going to see that things are made right for you. I've been very blind. I have longed for a reconciliation, I admit, with this husband who, poor stuff as he is, loves you still. But I see what a sentimental ass I've been, and how right you are."

She put her hand to her throat as if the soft lace suffocated her; she had grown very pale indeed.

"What," she gasped, "do you know of my plans and my intentions, Mr. Bulstrode? I have not told them to you."

"But I've been able to guess them," he replied.

"You've dared to, then?" she flashed.

"Oh, don't blame me," he returned. "Seeing you as I have all the while, I've been forced to make out something—to attach some reason to your living in this isolation. You've wanted, not unnaturally and very cleverly, I acknowledge, to see what's been going on at Westboro', what the Duke's been up to."

Her voice was suffocated as she said:

"Oh, stop, please! Whatever has come to you, Mr. Bulstrode, I don't know, or why you dare to speak to me as you do."

Seeing her agitation he said smoothly: "My dear child, you're so right in everything you've done, and of course I shall stand by you."

She made a dismissing gesture. "Oh, I don't need you, I don't want you."

He smiled benignly on her. "But I'm here, and I'm going to see you through."

"See me through what?"

"Through your divorce," he said practically.

"But you're Westboro's friend," she stammered, and he repudiated with just a little hesitation in his voice:

"Oh, not so much as yours. But I'm the friend of both of you in this. It's the best thing all round."

The gentleman's attitude so baffled her, he was so serious, and yet he took it so lightly, apparently, that she was obliged to believe he meant what he said.

"You talked to me very differently," she reminded him, and he shrugged.

"Oh, I've been far too emotional and unpractical. I'm going henceforth to look at things from the worldly and conventional stand-point."

She put out her hand beseechingly. "Oh, leave that for the rest of us. It quite spoils you."

"I don't pretend to think—" He made his gaze small as he looked past her in an attitude of reflection. "Oh, I don't claim that, it's an ideal way of looking at things. But there is not much idealism in the modern divorce, is there?"

The Duchess took a turn across the floor, twisting her fair hands together, then came round to his side and sat down on a low chair near him.

"Are you quite serious?" she asked. "But I know that you are not. Let me at least think so. Your words shock me horribly"—and she looked piteously at him. "I have felt you to be such a gentle person, and yours is such an understanding atmosphere."

Bulstrode had given himself methodically another cup of tea, and helped himself now to sugar.

"Oh, atmosphere!" he repeated scornfully. "One can't live on air, you know. And I have been of the most colorless kind."

"Well, you've changed terribly," she accused him.

"I've only come down to solid earth," he explained. "And the earth's after all where we

belong, Duchess. Stand firm, keep to your own part of it, and don't cloud-gaze, or somebody with a claim will knock you off your little foothold."

"Oh, *heavens!*" exclaimed his companion.

The gentleman, who appeared at length quite to have finished his material enjoyment of the tea, put his second empty cup down and looked at the lady.

"You should have married an American husband," he said to her, "a man who would have idolized you, not cared whether you developed or not. A duchess isn't far enough up. An American empress is higher."

The lady listening to him, shuddered a little.

"As it is," he went on regretfully, "you've been forced to develop, whether or not you wanted to, to grow finer and freer, to go farther on, to become more delightful. Here you are progressed and civilized, after years of education, experience and suffering, and, my poor child, here you are all alone."

She cried out, "Oh, Mr. Bulstrode," with a little gasp.

"Oh, no, no," he softly ejaculated, "it is not fair! You're terribly wasted, and you've been, as you too well know, terribly betrayed."

But here he felt her hand on his arm with a strong grasp. She shook the arm a little.

"Don't go on," she said deeply. "I tell you not to go on." After a few seconds, in which he heard the fire and the slow bubbling of the gently boiling water and the cooing of the doves without, under the eaves, the Duchess said: "Listen to me. I haven't talked at all to you, let me say something now."

Her companion reflected to himself: "Well, at all events, she's not going to malign the Duke; that's a foregone conclusion."

The Duchess clasped her hands round her knee and raised her face to him.

"Do you think," she asked, "that there's any egoist as nasty as a feminine one? Men are admitted to be generally selfish, but we specialize, and each one of us has the faculty of getting up some new and peculiar brand, I begin to believe. At any rate, when I married, I was an egoist, and I've stayed on being one until a very little time ago. I suppose I must in a way have more or less ornamented my position, as the papers say. I did have two children as well, and in that way fulfilled my duty as a Westboro'. But really and truly, I have never in the least been a wife, and very little of a mother. I was as silly and vain as could be, and I never for a moment valued my husband. I wasn't indifferent to my children, but I was absorbed by my worldly life, and when my little boys were taken ill and died, I was on a dahabeah on the Nile, and I don't think that Cecil ever forgave us for being so far away."

She remained quiet for a long time, looking down at her hands, and when she lifted her face Bulstrode saw that she had wept.

"That," she went on, "broke the ice round my heart, when I came home to those empty rooms."

He said soothingly, "There, there, my child."

"Oh, let me go on," she urged him, "let me speak. I shall probably never feel like doing so again. But at that time when I turned to find my husband, I discovered that I had no power over him, and I realized that for years I had not possessed his love. I suppose you'll tell me that it is unusual for a woman to see so clearly as this. Perhaps it is. At any rate, just because I did so clearly, I forgave him when he came to me last year, at Cannes."

"You were wonderful!" he repeated again, "perfectly noble, and, as I said before, Westboro' did not deserve you."

She did not here, as she had done before, catch him up; on the contrary, after a few moments, she asked him point-blank:

"What then do you advise us, knowing us both, to do?"

He was distinctly disappointed that she should have put the question to him, and gave her time to withdraw it as he asked tentatively: "You really feel that you must ask me, Duchess?"

"Tell me, at all events."

"You are quite sure that you could not go back to your husband?"

After a little pause, she lingeringly said:

"Yes, quite sure. You must know that he will not be the first to break the ice now." Then she pushed: "You would advise my filing my papers for divorce?"

Held in this way pitilessly for a direct challenge, he met her eyes with his own, asking her gently:

"Is there nothing that speaks for Westboro' more distinctly than anything I can say? And more appealingly than anything which you in all your pride feel?"

The Duchess assented that there was, with a movement of her lips; she put her hands over her face and so sat quietly for a few moments, and when she spoke again to her visitor, her words were irrelevant. When some few moments after she bade him good-by, she regretted his absence in London and begged him to come and see her as soon as he returned.

"Come," she said, "at least to see whether I am here or whether I have pitched my tent and gone away."

As Bulstrode stood in the doorway she asked him: "I understand there are a lot of people at the castle for Christmas, and among them will be Mrs. Falconer? Isn't it so? Is she really so very lovely?"

"It's a different type of loveliness from yours," Bulstrode returned. And the Duchess supposed: "A happier type?"

"Well, she's rather happy I think, take it all together," Jimmy said.

"Has she children?"

"None."

"Is she in love with her husband?"

And he was so long searching for a reply that the Duchess laughed quietly.

"Poor man," she said, "don't bother. But then since she's so happy, she must be in love with somebody else's husband."

But he put her right immediately.

"I don't think she in the least is. And why," he went on, "since happiness is so greatly the question of other people's state of mind, might we not let it go at the fact that she is herself very much loved?"

The Duchess looked at her guest rather absently. She was thinking of the happy beauty, the woman of a different type from her own, whose presence at Westboro' had been sought by her husband for the second time.

"Oh," she answered rather absently, giving Jimmy her hand, "she wouldn't, you know, be happy if the feeling were all on the other side."

When the Duke had casually asked his guest's plans for Christmas week, Bulstrode had come near to offending his host by declaring that he could not possibly be one of a second house party.

"Do you, then," Westboro' had asked, "*hate* the holidays?"

The genial Bulstrode had assured him to the contrary.

"Nor do I," continued the Duke, "even though I'm a miserable man on the verge of a divorce. I expect there's too long a line of jolly Christmases back of the Westboro's for me to mope through the season. But I don't want to have Christmas coming to an empty house, my dear fellow"—He put it pathetically, "there's no one in this gloomy place but yourself and myself. We must have a Christmas party. The tenants will, of course, be noisy and cheerful, but I'm going to ask a lot of people down and make the list out now."

And Bulstrode had, however, firmly insisted that he could not really stop on—that he must go away. "There are," he wound up his arguments, "a thousand reasons why I should go."

But Westboro' had comprehendingly suggested that they might together bring "every reason" down to the country. "And," continued his Grace, "we'll narrow things into the most intimate circle possible. For I shall ask the Ravensworths of Surrey and their children, there are eight of them, ripping little things; they used to play with my boys. We'll turn them loose and have a tree, old man."

Jimmy watched his face with a keen pity, for there had not been one ray of light in it as he planned for his celebration.

"But you arrange to come back for Christmas Eve. There *must* be some one in charge—I

mean to say, some one so that if the whole thing is too much for me, why I'll bolt and you'll have to stand by."

He was, as he spoke, writing the names on a sheet of paper. Bulstrode felt the plan to be rather *triste* and lifeless, and he knew that he could not and would not keep the Duchess' secret much longer, let its revelation cost him what it would.

"Westboro'," he said, "I shall have to be getting off to-morrow. You know I would stand by you if I could possibly see my way clear."

"I know perfectly well," the Duke acknowledged, "what a rotten bore I've been, and how sick of me you must be." He wrote on: "I shall ask Mrs. Falconer (her husband is in the States); she is quite alone in town at Lady Sorgham's." As he quoted this last name the Duke folded his list up. He nodded affectionately at Jimmy. "You'll arrange perhaps to come down with Mrs. Falconer on the Friday train?"

And Bulstrode capitulating weakly, murmured, "Oh, we'll fetch the toys and things for the tree," he offered.

"Ripping!" his Grace nodded.

Jimmy, on his way at last to London, stopped once more at The Dials, and was hurrying across the forest when the Duchess herself appeared to him at the big dial. She wore her furs, muff, and big enveloping stole, her hat with fur on it, and a veil. She was not in house or garden trim. The urban air of her toilet was a surprise to Bulstrode, and he took in her readiness for something he had not expected, something great, something decisive.

"It's good of you to come when you must be full of delightful ways of passing your time, Mr. Bulstrode," she said, "and I wanted so much to see you again."

"Again?"

"Of course," she replied nodding, "again and many times. But I mean I wanted to see you *here*." Bulstrode did not want her to tell him a piece of final news. He did not care to learn of an arbitrary departure, and he said, laughing: "Then you don't like my property? Any repairs you...?"

"Oh, I adore The Dials," she said gravely, "and I can't think why they ever let you buy it, or what you'll do with it after I'm gone." She smiled. "... or with whom." Before he could speak she added: "Where is my husband to-day?"

"I left him wandering about the house like a lost spirit," Bulstrode replied. "Looking," he went on, "all about for something or other. I expect he himself didn't quite know what. For something to cheer up the empty rooms."

"Oh, don't," she murmured.

But he seemed pleased with the picture he drew. "I doubt if Westboro' stops in the house alone; he's probably gone out shooting."

"But he has a house full of people....?"

"No one has come, or is coming, after all."

"You don't mean to say that they've all refused!"

"Yes," Jimmy said, "every man of them, and all the women as well."

The Duchess put out her hand quickly, and said touchingly: "Oh, but you don't for a moment think——"

"That it's because of the scandal, dear lady?" he smiled. "Well, that would be a new phase. No, I think on the other hand they would revel, and the only reason in the world that they have not come down is that they were really asked too late. Christmas week, you know—"

"And, of course, then, Mrs. Falconer," the Duchess's face brightened. "She——"

"Oh, *she*!" Bulstrode exclaimed, "she's as right as possible. She's sure to be along in good season."

"Oh!" accepted the Duchess, "and with whom does she come?"

Bulstrode waited. "Well, of course, the poor thing expects to find more or less some one to help her bear up her end. And I can't say how she will take the fact of only us two."

The Duchess interrupted cheerfully:

"Why, she, of course, will go directly back! You don't think for a second that she would stop

on alone like that?"

"Alone?" Bulstrode gave her with a little malice. "But she'll have Westboro' and me so entirely to herself and one can always ask in the rector or curate or corral a neighbor."

But the Duchess shook her head as if she understood. "Oh, no, not at this time."

Bulstrode miscomprehended blithely: "Christmas time? You see, I know the visiting lady pretty well, and I believe she'll feel me to be more or less of a standby, and I know her spirit and her human kindness. I am inclined to think that she will feel it's up to her not to run off like a hare; to think that Westboro' may, in a way, need her; and that when she finds everybody's gone back on the poor man, and there's to be no tree after all, why, I'm tempted, by jove, to think——"

The Duchess helped him: "That she'll make a charity of it."

"Yes, if you like," he laughed. "Or be a sport," he preferred to put it. "Stay on, stand by. It will be perfectly ripping of her, you know."

But the Duchess had no sympathy for the other woman. Her eyes fixed themselves on the trees before her, and as a shot rang out in the distance she said abruptly: "Why, that might be Cecil, mightn't it? Does he shoot birds on your premises?"

Bulstrode wondered very much for what reason she was habited in street dress and furs, whether she had planned to leave The Dials or had intended going up to see her husband.

"Forgive me," he said, "if I seem to be shockingly in a hurry, but I must have a look at the time, for as it happens, even in this far-off place, I have an engagement."

Impulsively putting out her hand the Duchess exclaimed: "I can't ever, ever thank you."

"Oh, after your divorce——"

But she cried out so against his words that he hastened: "You want me to think then that you do not believe...."

"Believe!" she ardently repeated, "Oh, I don't know what I believe or think," and he saw that the poor thing spoke the truth. "It's I who am as unstable as the sea, I who am the derelict."

He contradicted her gently: "My dear, you're only trying to solve alone a problem which it takes two to answer. When you see Westboro' you will know."

She turned on him with the first sparkle of humor he had ever seen her display. "Why don't you marry Mrs. Falconer?"

He didn't start; indeed, the idea had such a familiar sound it would have been hard to frighten him with it from any corner.

"I thought you didn't believe in divorces?"

"Oh, but you'd make a wonderful husband!"

He laughed. "No one has ever thought so—*la preuve*....?"

With great frankness in her gesture and a great—he was quick to see it—a great affection—she put out her hand to him and said: "Oh, yes, you'd make a wonderful companion, and you've been a wonderful friend. If anything good comes to me now, I shall in great measure owe it to you."

He protested: "You owe me nothing, nothing."

There were tears in her eyes as she said: "But I want to, I like to, and I do. I don't know," she went on, "that I might not have been reconciled ultimately to my husband, but I feel quite sure it would only have been the basting up of the seam—it would have ripped away again. Did you ever—" she challenged him with still a little sparkle of humor, "hear of a thing called a change of heart?"

"Yes, at Methodist meetings."

She said gravely: "That's not what I mean. But whatever *has* happened it's only been since you told me things."

Her face was so girlish, her eyes so sweet, her humility so sudden, that her companion found himself embarrassed and could hardly find words to say good-by to her. She went on to say, in a tone so low that he bent a little over the dial to hear her. "You told me you could not advise my husband to come to me."

Ah, had he! It was hard to remember that. *Had* he said so?

"I think," she whispered, "you need not keep him away now, if he should want to come."

As her friend said nothing, she added in a voice more like a child than a great Duchess, "You may trust me. I *want* him to come— There, I've said it. I *hope* he'll come. If he doesn't—

"Why, then, you'll go away," he finished. "You can't bear it."

The Duchess shook her head. "I'll go to him, on the contrary."

"You were going?"

"Yes, when you came."

He cried out: "Oh, I'm off then, I'm off for London, and I shan't be back for the Christmas holidays. You may count on me."

The Duchess smiled delightfully, and was in a second the elusive woman, intangible, and impossible to seize.

"No, no," she said, "please don't exile yourself either to-day or to-morrow. It isn't after all the moment, and I want to prove to you that I'm not jealous. I've decided to wait until that lovely woman has gone away."

The waste of his territory, its largesse to no purpose, its vastness through which only unbearable silences echoed; accumulated revenues and hereditary title, only added to the Duke's melancholy.

He had planned the Christmas house party too late as it proved, and refusals, one after another, came in during the week. The poor gentleman's mood led him to resent each fresh defection on the part of his guests as personal wounds inflicted by old friends at a time when charity would have been sweet. And it was with really tragic melancholy that he threw the last letter down exclaiming:

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse."

He quite waited for a line from Mrs. Falconer, which would tell him that she, too, had decided to abandon him: and the thought of what he believed to be Jimmy's complications at The Dials caused him half to regard the matter with a pity for her.

"If Jimmy *isn't* married, he's the most whited of sepulchres!"

The satin shine of holly, the glimmer of pearly mistletoe, the odor of spruce and pine, and heavier scent of hemlock bewitched the castle throughout with their fragrance. Setting and decoration suggested a feast, and the Duke as he passed through the upper halls, and by the doors of his children's rooms, saw holly wreaths on the walls and that the little gates were twisted with green.

The day was dampish and the Duke, unable to bear the silence of the house, with his gun and his dogs and with a lack of resource and superfluity of ennui to urge him from the castle, started to tramp off his unrest. The afternoon was young, and the bare, naked sunlight fell over the bare nakedness of the land. The little low clumps of neutral-colored underbrush, the reddish-brown thickets between wood and field, would hide the birds well, and with his gun across his back, his hands in his pockets, his Grace covered many miles before he at length stopped to take in the length of the land or to listen for wings.

Coveys had flown up and away unseen by him, and their whirring unheard. His dogs had run off, and without being abruptly brought to heel, skulked back by themselves shamefaced and bewildered by the hunter's indifference. The holly reddened on the hedges, the scarlet berries bright among the glowing leaves; high in the poplars the parasite mistletoe with crystal balls, hung tiny white globules like fairy grapes; holiday in the air, and over the grey winter landscape the finest possible powder of snow lay pale under the furtive sun. As the forest edges closed about him and the Duke with still no idea of where he was going, continued to tramp, he unconsciously entered the property Bulstrode had lately acquired, and which he had begged his friend to avoid.

There was something in the country air, in its pungent sweetness, and in the season, that penetrated even Westboro's melancholy, and every now and then he lifted his head to breathe in deeply the fragrance of hemlock and the cold earthy aroma, the spice of bracken and the balm of a fragrant thicket that smelled like a rose. It was winter, however, and although a snow bird piped in it and the sun was out, there was a December quality that, in the mood he was in, overcame all the festivities of the time. He heard the bird who was persistent and sharp-voiced, and, for the first time thinking of the other game he had come out for, he paused. His dogs were gone, the beggars! He called them to no purpose, whistled and waited. They were a new brace and young. God knew where they had cut away to.

Before him, as he stood, the brown vistas of the winter forest opened out here and there into ochre circles and filled at this hour with brilliant sunlight, their round openings overflowing; the

light filtered gently out and was swallowed up by the cold and closer wood. Under his feet there was only the faint ghost of the late snowfall on the turned-up, curled-up edges of the dry leaves. There beeches, red as copper, and iron-strong oaks struck their roots deep down into the mould. Westboro' did not know where he had wandered to, but here and there through the bare trees gleamed the white of a statue on its mossy base, and a little farther along, a broken pedestal held its slender column up amongst the tree trunks as mossy and veined as they, and right in the heart of the bowl, on a brick pedestal was a sundial, a round brass disc, cut into with the tooth of time, and all black and green. The sun at this moment shone full on it and its slight shadow fell along the noon. The Duke stooped down and through the glass read the inscription:

Utere dum licet.

"I'm a trespasser," he thought. "This is Bulstrode's property."

Through an opening just to the right he could see a brown path, and at the end of it a gate.

"What the deuce could Jimmy have so wanted this old place for? What was he hiding here?"

He turned back with the intention of taking as sudden leave of the place as he had made an entrance. He saw his dogs in front of him and called them. Before him lay the clean low fall of the meadow with the line of high hedge, and directly opposite him he could see the elms of his own park. He had not gone more than a couple of hundred feet away before he paused again and turned about to have one last look back at the enchanting place. As he stood thus, in Jimmy's property, he at first took it to be a trick of vision, for he stood perfectly rigid, peering back at the opening he had left not five minutes before. He leaned forwards, setting his eyeglass and staring at two figures who had come into the bowl and stood close by the big dial.

He set his gun on the ground and leaned upon it. There was a cordial meeting; he could hear the voices but he could not distinguish their words, and during all the interview, which must have consumed some fifteen minutes, the Duke never stirred. Finally, and curiously enough it seemed a short time to him, they took leave of each other, the man going out of the forest by a different path, the woman slowly turning down the neat walk that led to the brick arch, and to the old house. Whether or not the Duke had at this moment the vaguest suspicion of her, suspicion of his friend or of his wife that did them wrong, he never had time or clearness to reflect or to ask himself. A dense blindness took his senses away from him. He put his hands out to steady himself in vain, and staggered. His dogs were at his feet, he fell over them, struggled to get his balance back and like a stricken tree went down. In his heavy fall on his gun it discharged, filling his upper arm and shoulder with a quantity of bird shot. The scattering pain, instead of finishing his faint, roused him with a sharp, ugly sting, and the rush of the warm, wet blood. He half picked himself up, and then, aware of the pain tearing his muscles and flesh, he fell back like a dog on his haunches. Through his confusion he still contrived to remember a little path, and inch by inch he dragged himself towards it. He pulled along over the leaves and russet paths of ground. His bare hand finally struck the bricks of the little walk and he could still know that he was wonderfully in the road. There was a cloud before his swimming eyes and his troubled mind; his face, pale as death, was lifted towards the arch; leaving a bloody trail as he crawled along the ground, he contrived to reach the gate and fell across its threshold. His head lay on his arm, the string of his broken eyeglass wound pathetically about his wrist. The Duke proved to be a modern replica of the poor knight who fell, face downwards, on the grass when Elizabeth's carriage passed him by, some four hundred years before the present Duke.

After Bulstrode had left her, the Duchess of Westboro' hurried back to the house that was not her home; to the little long drawing-room that was not hers. For the first time since her voluntary exile, since her occupation of this asylum, she found it bereft of charm and the cosey, dear place as cold to her as if the snows had drifted in and filled a deserted nest. It had nevertheless been a cloister, and she knew it, where the best of her had prayed, where the true woman—and the true woman is always something of a saint—had folded submissive hands, where self had gone away and left nothing at all but love.

On this Christmas Eve, The Dials was the loneliest corner of England. The scarcely occupied house suggested to the Duchess the thought of a stocking hung before a chimney when there were no children who cared whether it was filled or not, when there was no reason why St. Nicholas should pass. But it was only the very edge of her thoughts that touched anything so fantastic as this picture. The Duchess was serious and lonely. With a sigh, and winking back tears she threw off her furs, laid off her hat, and, after poking up the fire into sparkling brightness, she wandered up-stairs to the apartment that she had made her bedroom. Under the low eaves the bed-chamber shone out gay with chintz, fresh and sweet as a midwinter bouquet, the frostiness coming in around it through the slightly opened window, and there was the scent of the firs and the cedar wood that closely hemmed the old place in.

"Heavens!" thought the Duchess, half aloud. "How dreadfully in love Jimmy Bulstrode is, how dreadfully, faithfully in love!" And then she went on to say: "How dreadfully I am myself in love, and no one is hurrying to *me!*"

She walked aimlessly about the pretty room, irritated and annoyed at the cloister effect. She

found it too remote, too virgin, and no room for a wife. "I promised," she mused, "to wait until Mrs. Falconer has gone. I shall break my promise. Oh, I can't really wait at all! If things are going to be as bad as this, I want to leave England, I want at least to know. And Jimmy will forgive me, it's such a wonderfully good cause ... a woman going to find her husband on Christmas Eve!"

The Duchess threw open the window to its widest. Down in the garden on the stone wall the big dial lay in the shadow of the afternoon. She could not read its motto, but she knew perfectly what it said—*Utere dum licet*. As she leaned out above her garden, under her window the snowballs hung their waxen globes in a green tree. There were a few winter roses blooming, and the English garden had the beauty of summer in winter time.

The Duchess heard a sharp sound close to the house. It was a rifle shot, and died instantly on the still air. Shots were not uncommon in this season, but here in The Dials woods they were entirely out of character; in fact, they were quite inadmissible. There was no shooting let, and a shot could only mean poaching, or something more serious. The Duchess waited a few moments, but no other sound followed. She nevertheless drew the casement in, and, going down stairs threw her stole about her shoulders and opened the house door into the garden. At the sight of her, down by the other end of the wall, the gardener lifted up his bent form, and with a little pannier of hot-house violets in his hands, hurried towards his lady.

"Mellon," said she, "have you any violets?"

The Duchess took the fragrant basket with its delicate burden.

"A mort, my lady."

"Pick them all, Mellon, and all the flowers from the green-house too, every one of them, and fetch up whatever there is to the cottage."

The old man was deaf, as well as discreet, and if this sudden command to vandalism surprised him, he did not say so. Holding his hand behind his ear, he nodded.

"I shall send them," the Duchess thought, "up to Jimmy Bulstrode. I think he will understand, and I will ask him at the same time to take his friend off somewhere in a motor that I may go unobserved to the castle."

She said a few more words to the old man, asked him a few questions, then with the basket on her arm she was about to turn away when she remembered the shot.

"Did you hear a shot, Mellon? They should not be shooting about here, you know." But the old man had heard nothing, and, intending to find the lodgekeeper who was clipping the trees on the lower terrace and ask him to go through the woods for her, the Duchess walked toward the gate and in the direction of the brick path.

As she came up to it she gave a low cry, lifted her hands to her heart; the basket of flowers fell to the earth and scattered their purple blooms at her feet. Then the hands that had gone to her heart extended, she held out her arms and went forwards, crying her husband's name.

The Duke of Westboro' had managed to pick himself up. He was a strong man, in the fulness of health and vigor; there was nothing of the mollicoddle about the last Duke of the line. The sound of voices had reached his dull ear, his swoon was over, and he had manfully, with a few sturdy curses, pulled himself up and now stood, albeit very pale, clinging to the gatepost, leaning on it, finding his legs shaking and his balance not all he could wish. Before him was a little brick house, with bright curtains in the windows, and between it and himself, lovely as a ghost, and no less white, was his wife, and her arms were extended towards him.

"Cecil!" she cried. "Oh, my God! Cecil, what has happened to you?"

Before Westboro' knew it, the arms to which he had gone in visions were about him and the soft shoulder gave him a prop more fragile perhaps than the stone against which he leaned, but it was a living support, and it felt warm and wonderful.

"Don't," he said vaguely, "get near me. I'm nasty and bloody. It's all right; I'm only a bit scratched, really. A lot of beastly shot has gone off into my shoulder. Just call some one to help me, will you?"

"Cecil," she said, "lean on me, put your arm around my shoulder; you can perfectly well get along with only me. Come, come!"

The Duke saw that he could perfectly get along with another faint—he was near to it, but something besides his wound and his light head kept him manfully to his feet. With his left hand he very firmly pushed the Duchess a little away from him.

"Come?" he repeated. "Come where?"

"Home," said the Duchess with a catch in her voice—she was bearing up. "Oh, lean on me! You'll fall, you'll fall! Mellon!" she cried. "O Mellon!"

But the Duke put up his hand. "I'm all right," he said. "Don't call. What house is that? What home do you mean?"

"Mine," said the Duchess, "my house—that is, I mean to say, Mr. Bulstrode's."

The Duchess saw a slight wave of red rush up her husband's pale cheek.

"Damn Bulstrode!" he breathed. "What the devil does he do here? I saw you together—I saw you not half an hour since—that is the whole mischief of it—it was too much for me—it took away my senses and I fell on my gun, and the beastly thing went off. If I ever get back to where Bulstrode is——"

"Cecil!" cried the Duchess. She again wound her arms around him, and it was as well that she was a strong, fine creature and that the columns of the gate were back of him, for Westboro' was swaying like a child that has just learned to walk.

"He is fainting!" she cried. "Mellon, Mellon!"

The old man had not heard his mistress but he had seen her, and after staring open-mouthed at the couple at the gate, he came scurrying like a rabbit, dropping his shears on the wall. They hit the big dial with a ring.

The Duke heard the steps and tried to start forwards; also tried weakly to extricate himself from his wife's embrace. "I beg your pardon," he said, with a coolness that had something of the humorous in its formality—"I beg your pardon, but I am *not* going to Bulstrode's house, you know."

"*Cecil*," pleaded the woman tenderly, "how ridiculous you are! Bulstrode's house! Why, it's mine! Oh, don't break my heart. He's only bought it, you know, that's all."

"Break her heart!" It was a new voice that spoke to the Duke of Westboro'. He had never heard it in all his life. It was warm and struggling for clearness, it was full of tears and quivering, it was the voice of love, and unmistakable, certainly, to a lover.

"What was Bulstrode doing here?" he persisted.

"Going to Mrs. Falconer," breathed the Duchess.

The Duke moved a step forwards: "What are you doing here?"

"Going to you, Cecil—I have *been* going to you all day. I think I have been going to you ever since you left me that night on the Riviera; at any rate, I was on my way to the castle as you came."

The Duke halted again on his crawling way. Mellon, who had really reached his side, was doing his best to be of some use and kept himself well under the wounded arm, on which the blood had clotted and dried, but ceased to flow.

"Lean hard on me, your Grace," pleaded the gardener, and with his word, he looked over at his mistress to see if she realized who their noble visitor was.

With fine disregard for his help or existence, the Duke said crossly: "Send this damned gardener away."

"Oh, Cecil, no, no; you can't stand without him."

They had reached the garden wall, just at the place where the big dial, round and shining, had come a little out of the shadow and the last of the afternoon sun touched its edges. Westboro' lurched towards the wall. "Send this man away," he commanded.

"He is deaf, Cecil, as the stones." But at her husband's face she motioned to Mellon: "Stand away a bit. His Grace wants to rest on the wall. I'll call you."

With his wife's arms about him, Westboro' leaned on the garden wall, his ashen face lifted to her.

"I've only one arm," he said. He put it around her and he drew her down as close to him as he could. He felt her face warm against his, wet against his with tears. As the Duke, who, Bulstrode said, was no lover, kissed his wife, the dial seemed to sing its motto aloud.

"You *were* coming to me?" he breathed. "Do you forgive me? ... Then," said Westboro', satisfied by what he heard, "I'm cured. I love you—I love you."

The woman could not find her voice, but as she held him she was the warmest, sweetest prop that ever a wounded man leaned upon. After a few seconds she helped him to rise, helped him on, and he found his balance and his equilibrium to be very wonderful under the circumstances, and managed to reach the door-sill. Mellon and the maids were there, and as the Duchess passed in, leading her husband, she bade them send for a doctor as fast as they could and to send at once

for Bulstrode at the castle.

Westboro's wound had become a sort of intoxication to him, and he assured her, "I'll be all right in an hour. I need no one but you; send them all away, all away."

He had never commanded her before, he had let her rule him, he had been indifferent to her disobedience. But now she did what he bade her, and led him to the drawing-room, suddenly repossessed of all its old charm; led him to the lounge, where he sank down. Here, by his side, she gave him stimulants and bathed his head and hands, waiting for the doctor to come; and Westboro', like his ancestors who had fought in the King's wars, bore up like a man with no resemblance whatsoever to the amorous cavalier whose curls had met the dust of the road for love of Queen Elizabeth.

The Duchess found him that best of all things—very much of a man, and knew that he was hers. And he, more wild with love for her than suffering physical pain, found her a woman and knew that she loved him and that she was his.

The house, so deserted and desolate an hour ago, grew fresh, warm, and rosy as over the west meadows the sunset, gilding the wall and The Dials, flushed the windows red, and the deserted bird's-nest, lately "filled with snow" appeared to have, as the light rained upon it, filled itself with roses. So, an hour later, it seemed to Bulstrode, when he came and found it housing the lovers.

THE EIGHTH ADVENTURE

VIII

IN WHICH HE COMES INTO HIS OWN

England, the heart of the countryside, freshened by December and drifted over by delicate breaths that are scarcely fog, and through which like a chrysanthemum seen behind ground glass the sun contrives to shine, the English country in December is one thing, London quite another.

Jimmy wandered across from Paddington to his destination, part of the time on foot, part of the time peering from a crawling hansom in immediate peril of collision with every other object that like himself lost bearings in the nightmarish yellow fog.

He fetched up before No. —, Portman Square, at mid-day, and rang the door bell of Lady Sorgham's town-house, and in his eagerness to find his friend did not ask himself how the time accorded with calling hours.

She was at home.

An insignificant footman told him this, and the gentleman reflected that it was astounding what the words, heard often in the course of ten years, meant to him still.

In the sitting-room, before a coal fire, a writing table at her side, a pen in her hand, he found Mrs. Falconer.

He sincerely struggled with an inability to speak at once, even the consoling how-d'-dos that cover for us a multitude of feelings, were not at his tongue's end.

The fire had burned away a few feet of fog and lighted lamps and candles shone pallidly through an obscurity about whose existence there could be no doubt.

The inmates of Lady Sorgham's thoroughly English and thoroughly comfortable drawing-room were aliens, possessing neither of them a hearthstone within range of several thousand miles. But no sooner had they greeted—Bulstrode triumphantly peering at her through both real and mental haze—shaken hands, and each found a seat before the grate, than an enchanting homeliness overspread the place. Bulstrode felt it and smiled with content to think she did as well, and remembered an occasion in America when they had both of them missed a train for some out-of-the-way place and found themselves side by side in a mid-country station to pass there three hours of a broiling afternoon. The flies and mosquitoes buzzed about them, the thermometer registered ninety degrees, but happy, cool and unruffled Mary Falconer, smiling up at him from her hard bench, had said:

"Jimmy, let's *build* here!"

"No one, Jimmy, is old"—Mrs. Falconer had once said to him on an occasion when a word regarding gray hairs had drifted into their conversation. Noticing the smooth reflection of the light along her hair, Bulstrode had spoken of its golden quality, and the lady had suddenly covered the strand with her hand; she knew that there ran a line she did not want him to see.

"No one is old, Jimmy, who has even the least little bit of future towards which he looks! It's only those people whose doors are all shut, whose window blinds are all drawn to, who, no matter which way they look, see no opening into a distance towards which they will want to go—only those people are old!"

And as for Bulstrode, if Mrs. Falconer's idea were right, he was a very young man still, for at the end of every path others opened and led rapidly away. Scene gave on to scene, dissolved and grew new again. Every door gave to rooms whose suites were delightful, indefinite, and all followed towards a future whose existence Bulstrode never doubted. But there were certainly times, as the days went methodically on, there were decidedly many times when it took all his faith and his spirit to endure the *étape* that lay between self and life. Such a little tranquil home as a certain property he had lately acquired was what he dreamed of sharing with Mrs. Falconer. He did not, with any degree of anxiety, ask himself whether or not it were dead men's shoes he was waiting for, and no clear, formulated thought of tangible events took existence in his mind. But he knew that he waited for his own.

It was with some such personal feeling that in something that looked like a future he might one day lead the woman he loved home, that he had taken any pleasure whatsoever in his involuntary purchase of the old property known as The Dials. The gray house down in Glouceshire in its half-forsaken seclusion, the lie of the land round it, its shut-offness from the world, its ancient beauty, had been a constant suggestion to him of a future dwelling, and the doors, the windows, the low-inviting rooms, the shadowy stairways, ingles, gables, terraces, the dials and sunken gardens, had appeared to him conceived, planned and waiting to be the settings for a life of his own. He wanted very much to tell Mrs. Falconer all about the lovely English country-seat.

In the room where they now talked, wreaths of fog filled the corners like spiders' dusty webs that poised and swung. The odor that stamps England hung in the mist, furthermore permeated with the scent of a bouquet at Mrs. Falconer's elbow and which at one moment of his visit Jimmy recognized for a lot of roses sent by parcel post from the Westboro' greeneries.

"Do you ever sew?" he asked her, and she admitted to a thimble which persistently, with a suggestion of reproach, turned up every now and then amongst her belongings; now falling out from a jewel box, then stowed away in a handkerchief case, out of place and continually reproachful: kept because it had been her mother's.

If he did not speak other than in a general way of the rather long visit he had been making to the Duke of Westboro' in Glouceshire, he did tell his friend all about The Dials and dwelt on the fascination that the old place possessed. The Dials was, in point of fact, very agreeably described to Mrs. Falconer, who looked it out on the map of Glouceshire, and Bulstrode's purchase (for he had legally gone in for it, the whole thing), was made to seem a very jewel of a property.

"It's as lovely as an old print," she said, "as good as a Turner. You're a great artist along your lines, Jimmy. Don't have it rebuilt by some more than designing architect in trouble, or landscape-gardened by some inebriated Adam out of charity. Leave it beautifully alone."

"Oh, I will," he assured her. "It shall tumble away and crush away in peace. You shall see it all, however," he assured, "for you really will come down for Christmas? You see, poor old fellow, Westboro's house is rather empty."

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Falconer.

"You see, every one else has gone back on him."

"Poor dear," sympathized the lady. "Of course we'll go down."

No matter to what extent he had thought of her, and it was pretty sure to be a wide one, her beauty struck him every time afresh. There was the fine exquisiteness of *fin de race* in Mary Falconer. Her father had been an Irishman born, and the type of his island's lovely women was repeated in his daughter's blue eyes, the set of her head and her arms; her taper and small-boned little wrists, her cool hands with the slender fingers told of muscle and moulding and completed the well-finished, well turned-out creature whose race it had taken generations to perfect. These distinctions her clever father bequeathed her as well as her laugh and her wit, her blue eyes and her curling hair.

Bulstrode stayed on in the dingy delightful room, until at an order of his hostess, luncheon was served them on a small table, and over the good things of an amazingly well-understood buffet and a bottle of wine, they were left alone. Bulstrode stayed on until the fog in the corners darkened to the blackest of ugly webs and choked the fire and clutched the candles' slender throats as if to suffocate the flame. Tea was served and put away and the period known as *entre*

chien et loup at length stole up Portman Square alongside the fog and found Bulstrode still staying on....

Later, much later, when the lamps in the street and the square found themselves, with no visible transition, lighting night-time as they had lighted day—when the hansoms began to swing the early diners along to their destinations, a hansom drew up before No. —, Portman Square.

It was at the hour soft-footed London had ceased to roll its rubber tires down the little street, and only an occasional cab slipped by unheard. But a small hand cart on which a piano organ was installed wheeled by No. —, Portman Square, and stopped directly under the Sorghams' window and a man began to sing:

"I'll sing thee songs of Araby
And tales of old Cashmere."

The creature was singing for his living, for his supper doubtless, certainly for his breakfast, but he chanced to possess a remarkable gift and he evidently loved his trade. The silence—wherein all London appeared to listen, the quiet wherein the magically suspended room had swung and swung until even Bulstrode's clear mind and good sense began fatally to blur and swing with the pendulant room—was broken into by the song.

And as Bulstrode moved and turned away his eyes from the woman's lovely face, she sighed and covered her own eyes with her hands. The small coffee table had been taken away. Mrs. Falconer was in a low chair leaning forwards, her hands lying loosely in her lap. The distance between the two his hand could have bridged in one gesture. The voice of the street singer was superb, liquid and sweet. He sang his ballad well.

"I'll sing thee songs of Araby
And tales of old Cashmere."

Mrs. Falconer's guest rose.

"You'll come down for Christmas," he said, "and I'll meet you as we have arranged, tomorrow."

"Jimmy," she protested, "it's only ten o'clock."

"I must, however, go."

"Nonsense. Where will you pass the next hour and a half? There's not a cat in town."

"Nevertheless, I promised a man to meet him at the...."

"Jimmy!"

He had reached the door, making his way with a dogged determination and, like a man who has touched terra firma after months on a dancing brig, still not feeling quite sure of the land or its tricks.

"How you hurry from me," she said softly.

"Oh, I'm hurrying off," he explained brightly, "because I want to get hold of that chap out there and take him to supper, and to find out why he isn't on the operatic stage. He's got a jolly voice. Good night, good night."

He was gone from her with scant courtesy and a brusquerie she knew well, adored and hated! During these last years she had done her cruel best, her wicked best, to soften and change and break it down.

The curtains, as she drew them back, showed that the fog had for the most part lifted, and she was just in time to see the piano and the two musicians disappear in the mist which still tenaciously held the end of the street in shadow—a gentleman in long evening cloak and high hat hurried after the street people. The woman's face was tender as she watched the distinguished figure melt into the fog, and at her last glimpse of her friend she blew a kiss against the pane.

Bulstrode did not go back that night to Westboro'. He wired out that Mrs. Falconer and himself would be down for dinner the following day and he also wired for a motor to meet him some few miles from Penhaven Abbey, as the motor did the next day.

As he speeded towards Penhaven Bulstrode leaned towards the man who drove him.

"Stop first at the inn, will you, Bowles? I'll order tea there, and then drive on to the station at

the Hants. It's the three o'clock from London we're to meet, you know, and we've just the time."

The Abbey and its clustering village hung on the hill side some fifteen lovely miles away to the south of them. And Bulstrode, who was at length obediently answering the call of it, and in response to the fancied bell of the entire country side, religiously hastening to whatever might reward him, settled himself back in his corner.

He saw the mist fly by him as his carriage cut out its way rapidly through Gloucestershire. The air was not too cold in spite of the dampness, for the vapor rose high, and above and below it the atmosphere was clear.

Mrs. Falconer herself had chosen Penhaven as a place possible to drive over to as far as Bulstrode was concerned, and far enough away to stop over in, for tea. Bulstrode carried in his pocket the note of it, she had written out for him. It bore the arrivals of trains, the address of the inn; she had herself written this, recurring to a pretty fallacy she liked to indulge in that Jimmy forgot trains, missed them, and forgot rendezvous, and that he never really knew. Well, at all events, he was not likely to miss meeting this one. He had thought about nothing else since he left her in London and prepared for her as he was always preparing for her as one makes ready for the dearest guest at a feast.

The fact that not only had she divinely consented to the Penhaven scheme, but that she had herself arranged the whole thing, made the romance of the idea first appeal to herself and then readily to Bulstrode; the fact that she had been the creator of the little excursion that gave them to each other for several hours before what the castle had to offer them of surprise or dulness—did not in any measure rob the occasion of the charm of the *imprévue* for the lady herself. Nor did she in the least feel that it was any the less his because it was so essentially her own plan.

It proved either too cold or too late to see the cathedral, to see anything more than the close which, side by side, they had wandered through together a few moments before tea. Penhaven's distinguished gloom was not disturbed, and in their subterranean vaults lying all along their stones, the dukes and the abbés and the duchesses remained unlit in their stern crypts by the verger's candle on this Christmas Eve.

At the little vulgar inn (in a stuffy sitting-room a fire had spluttered for some quarter of an hour before the train arrived), Mrs. Falconer had made Jimmy his tea in a vulgar little bowl-like teapot, and as her hands touched the pottery's blue glaze served very well for a halo. As she buttered him slices of toast herself, and spread them with gooseberry jam and herself ate and drank and laughed and chattered, she had been, with the tea things about her and her sleeves turned back as she cut and buttered and spread, she had been with the roundness of her wrists and the suave grace of her capable hands, most adorably a woman, most adorably dear.

Her furs and coat laid aside, the hat at his asking laid aside in order, although he did not tell her so, that the air of home might be more complete for them. *Vis-à-vis* they had eaten together and laughed together and talked together till it grew later and later, and the motor waited without in the yard amongst the ravens and the ducks who peered from the straw of their winter quarters at the big awkward machine.

"Jimmy" ... she had started when the crumbs and dishes had been cleared away, and for some seconds did not follow up his name with any other word. It was always Bulstrode who took wonderful care of the time. It was he who gave her her hat, its pins, her coat, her furs, her gloves, one by one, her muff last, his eyes on her, as each article slowly went to place, until her big white veil wound and wound and pinned and fastened and hid her. "Jimmy," she whispered, as he ruthlessly and definitely opened the door and the cold rushed in, "let's build *here*."

Still it was she who took all the blame of their tardy departure from the homely hospitality of the inn; she assured him that she could make a wonderful toilet and in an incredibly short time, and that for once she wouldn't be late for dinner at the castle.

"Not," Bulstrode assured her, "that it in the least matters, but the Duke, as likely as not, would choose to dine alone; he was a man of moods."

"In which case," she had stopped with her foot on the auto step, "Penhaven isn't a bad place for tea, and why wouldn't dinner at this perfect inn...."

But Bulstrode met her words with a shake of his head and a shrug of his shoulders, and helped her firmly into the motor and sat again by her side.

"I can't tell you," he said, "what will be going on at the castle. I haven't been back since I left it two days ago, and almost anything can have happened in that time. The Duchess of Westboro' herself, in the interval, may have gone back to her husband."

"Heavens!" Mrs. Falconer exclaimed, "in which case how horribly *de trop* we shall be."

But Bulstrode consoled her with the thought that if they were *de trop* they would at least be *de trop ensemble*.

Amongst the handful of letters waiting for her in her dressing-room at the castle there had been a despatch from America. Even this, and a hasty look at her mail had not succeeded in holding her attention or even carrying it beyond the house. Her husband had expected to land in Liverpool at the end of the coming week; he was to take her home with him. And until he arrived she was breathing, as she always did in his absence, deeply.

There had been no one to greet them as Bulstrode and herself came into the castle, and she had hurried to her rooms to begin without loss of time her boasted rapid toilet. The dress, whose harmony had impressed her host, the Duke, on a former visit at the castle, had been laid out for her; its sumptuous color overspread the bed. But the lady chose instead a white gown whose art of holding to her, and holding her, in its simple lines and splendid sheen, made its beauty.

There was much of the true woman in this entirely lovely creature, as she stood before her glass and saw herself, the best example of the really beautiful American. Her naturalness gave her a freedom, a frankness, a grace, a certain imperial set of the head.

Bulstrode had once said to the Duchess of Westboro' that a woman should above all "console." Mary Falconer would have known what he meant. That sex she gloriously represented! The sweetness and dearness of her. Well, there were few women no doubt like her. Jimmy hoped so for the sake of the race, for the sake of the hearts of other men. She was the ideal fireside of home, and when, as she had twice done, she bade him, as that time she had said, "Build here," he knew what she meant and felt, and that she herself was exquisitely home.

Leaning over her dressing-table she scrutinized not her face, whose ardent beauty seemed to bloom upon the glass, but her hair as it fell and rippled and flowed round her brows. Along the edge of one of the lustrous waves was a touch as if her powder puff had brushed her hair. Mrs. Falconer put up her hand, smoothed the line, then let it lie as it grew. It so declared itself to be the first unmistakable white. A gardener's basket full of roses and camelias, gardenias and carnations had been sent up for her; but under the diamond at her breast she chose rather to fasten in a spray of mistletoe with its pale, grape-like berries. A long green scarf fell over her arm and against the whiteness of her dress like a branch of spring verdure, and permitted by the fashion of the day, there shook and trembled in her ears long, pear-shaped pearls which, like her thimble, had been her mother's.

As she left the security of her room and fire for the corridors and the publicity of the lower rooms, for the first time in her life she had a sudden feeling of *pruderie* at the bare beauty of her neck and arms. She felt as if she were coming unclad into the street, and drew her scarf across her breast. But she found herself to be quite alone in the drawing-room, and before she had time to be bewildered at her long desertion, a letter was handed her with a few murmured words by a footman. It perhaps served her right, she reflected, for so blandly coming into a house during a state of domestic upheaval, that she should turn out to be not alone the only guest, but without host or friend! The letter told her, as gently as it could without the satisfaction of any explanation, that both Bulstrode and the Duke of Westboro' were unavoidably absent. She turned the letter over with keen disappointment. Her dress, her beauty which the drive from Penhaven and the afternoon's happiness had heightened to a point that she might be pardoned for seeing, was then all for nothing! On what extravagant bent could the two men have gone?

"Both of them," she soliloquized with a shrug, "off on a hunt, I dare say, after a fool of a woman who doesn't know enough to stop at home."

Before she could further lash at her absent hostess, she found herself a few seconds later taking the scarcely palpable arm of the rector, whom the Duke, in a moment of abstraction, had asked to the Christmas-tree and whom he had subsequently forgotten to put off. The rector alone, of all the expected, turned up, his smile vacuous and his appetite in order. At the table laid for four, and great enough for forty, the clergyman and the lady faced each other. Mrs. Falconer smiled kindly, for as her friend had told the Duchess on the same afternoon, she was kind; and if she resented the apology for a man her slender *vis-à-vis* presented, she did not show her scorn; she smiled kindly at him. His cloth and habit, and cut even, wore the air of disapproval. Her jewels, the bare splendor of her neck and arms, seemed out of place, and yet she could not but be perfectly sure that even the dull eyes of her *vis-à-vis* not alone reflected, but confirmed, how lovely she was.

The reverend gentleman was new to Gloucestershire, but it turned out that he already knew its hearsays and its *on dits* and he knew when she asked him, something of the country and The Dials. It may have been that the bright aspect of the lady, her light mockery—for as she would she could not help falling into them even with this half-human creature—wickedly drew him on, gave the man license as he thought, to descend to scandal; at all events, after dinner, over a cigar smoked in her presence, the empty glass of Benedictine at his elbow, in his cheeks a muddy red diffused from his wine, the gentleman leaned forward, and tried to adapt his speech and topic to the worldly vein which he imagined was the habitual tenor of a fashionable woman's life.

"Even this lovely shire," he drawled its beauty—"cannot, so it would seem, be free from scandal. And where a minister would naturally look for help, wretchedly enough for the most part he only finds examples and warnings."

The rector lifted his eyes to the fine old ceiling as if in its shields and blazons he was

impressed by the blots of recent sins.

His hand touched the little liqueur glass. He picked it up and in a second of abstraction tried to drain its oily emptiness.

"Let me ring," said Mrs. Falconer, "and send for some more Benedictine, or better still, for some *fine*."

"No," he refused, and sedately put her right. "No more of anything, I think, unless it might be a bottle of soda. You spoke of lovely Glouceshire and then spoke of The Dials. Do you know the place?"

Only, she told him, by hearsay.

He solemnly supposed so; so he himself chiefly knew it, as indeed all the country side was growing to know it.

The eyes of the lady to whom the rector was retailing his little gossip were intently on him. But Mrs. Falconer in reality was not looking at him, neither did she at once find ready words to refute, to cast down, to blot out, his hideous suggestion that filled the room with its sooty blot.

Mrs. Falconer, who had good-humoredly been amused by his intense Britishness thus far, his pale lack of individuality, his perfect type, now looked sharply at her companion.

The rector had been more than right, Mrs. Falconer was used to the indifferent, rather brutal handling by society of human lives. Possibly as she adored people, no one of her set was more interested in the comedies and dramas of her *contemporains*. But there are ways and channels: what runs clear in one runs muddy in another.

The rector, in his own way, told her that for several weeks a very beautiful lady had been living at The Dials. She had, it appeared, never been out of the garden gate, and the servants were foreign, all save a deaf old gardener. But the beautiful lady who sought such peculiar seclusion, had a very constant visitor. Of course the rector was not able or sufficiently daring to affirm; with a cleverness worthy a better story he left his hearer to guess, imagine, who the visitor might be.

"Don't you think," Mrs. Falconer breathed, after a very short lapse into silence, "that we might let such ghosts alone on Christmas Eve?"

She rose and stood before him in her soft, luminous dress; her eyes were intent on him, but in reality she was not looking at him.

He had grown so detestable that she could bear his presence no longer; she found herself, however, wanting to learn all his knowledge to its finest detail. She found that she despised herself for any interest she might take. She got rid of him at length, how, she never knew. But she saw him leave her presence with relief.

When the miserable man, as she called him, had taken his leave, the deserted guest looked about her rather defiantly, as if the objects with which the room was filled were hostile. Then, with a half-audible exclamation she sank down in a chair, her elbow on the left arm of it, and her chin in her hand.

Well, the imputation, the character of what she had just heard vulgarly said and to which, for a bewildered second, she had perhaps vulgarly listened—was highly dreadful, highly disordering to her fashion of thinking and believing about Jimmy Bulstrode! Oh, for a moment she had half believed what that creature said, and her eyes had winked fast at the game before them! In the swiftness of the revolutions it had seemed for a sole flash real; but now that the noise had stopped and the carousel as well, she saw how *wooden* the horses were and that they were as dead as doornails! If she had been disturbed, she came loyally back now, with a glow and a rush of tenderness as she instantly re-instated what could never lose caste.

Oh, The Dials! She couldn't conceive what Jimmy had in reality, rashly, delightfully done there; what he had planted or installed, if he had planted or installed anything. But whatever the truth was, it was sure to be essentially right, as far as ethics went—she knew that at least. But Jimmy's delicacy and his heart were all too fine for the crude wisdom of the world or for her common-sense, which would have told him no doubt, had he cared to ask, that he was rash and wild.

She was prepared to hear that he had made some Magdalen a home in this prudish country place. At this possibility Jimmy's kindness and charity stood out graciously in strong contrast to the prudish judgment.

There were several long mirrors set in the panels of the room like lakes between green shores of old brocade, and they reflected her as she leaned forwards in her chair and looked about her, taking in the brightness of the perfect little room. It had been cut off from the wider,

grander spaces for more intimate passages in the social course of events, but there was nothing newly planned in its colors and tapestries, its hangings and furnishings; the effect was sombre rather, the objects had the air of use, of having participated in past existences, and like faithful servants, they seemed to wait to serve perfectly new events.

The especial brightness of the room came from the gay festooning that had found its way throughout the castle. The mirrors were dark with the velvet rounds of hemlock from which the miserable face of scandal, the sardonic face of divorce, under the conditions of the present domestic situation might well grin satyr-like from the Christmas wreaths. No doubt there were lots of ghosts about, ready to stride, to flutter, or to walk; the American woman put their histories and their legends impatiently by.

The facile way in which the Duchess of Westboro' had slipped out from the chafing of domestic harness, the egotistical *geste* with which she had so widely thrown over her responsibilities, fetched Mrs. Falconer up to her own life, from whose problems indeed her husband's absence alone set her free. Her affairs had lately rapidly progressed, flying, whirling. The circles the event of her marriage had originally created, touched at last the farthest limit; there was nothing left for them now but to scatter. The vortex had rapidly narrowed down, was narrowing down, and nothing remained but a sole object in the bed of the clear water; and as Mary Falconer looked at it she knew that the thing was a stone.

"We spend," she had once said to Bulstrode, "half our lives forging chains, and the other half trying to make ourselves free." Hadn't she wrenched with all her might to be rid of hers? materially she still wore her bonds and moved with a ball.

As she had driven away from Charing Cross Station, a month ago, after seeing her husband aboard the Dover and Calais special, she had breathed—breathed—breathed—stretched her arms and hands out to London, felt on her eye and brow a dew that meant the very dawning of liberty broke for her, and that she was for the time at least blessed by it, and free.

The Sorghams' London house had opened its refuge wide for her, and she had gone into it like a child, to sleep and rest, and there she had grown up again, to begin to think and to plan, project and puzzle as those who grow up must do. She had never thought to such practical purpose as she did in these days, and never come so nearly reaching an end.

Just before dressing for dinner on this night, at the sensation the touch of her husband's telegram gave her, she realized how near to a not unusual decision she was, and when she put the envelope by with the rest of her mail, the part of her mind which she would not let herself look into was in confusion and doubt.

More effectively than Falconer's coming could have done, his few telegraphed words brought him to his wife's consideration. And the fantastic story of The Dials helped her, ridiculous as it was, burlesque as it was, to think; in the very humor of it, a shock, and helped her more reasonably to consider what otherwise her feelings would have turned to tragedy.

Jimmy's ecstasies about the place recurred to her with renewed cordiality. He had spent an hour at least describing it, and when he had finished with "A woman must be there, it is made for a woman," Mary Falconer had only seen herself in the frame that the old place presented. She exclaimed aloud: "Oh, no, no," and continued to affirm to herself that it was too fantastically absurd—"Jimmy!"

"It's only some delightful bit of charity, and he's too afraid of my wretched conservatism and my ironies to have told me frankly about it."

Having in a very unfeminine way opened a crack for reason, its honest face peered through, and Mary Falconer glanced at it with a sigh and a half-amused recognition, as if she had not been face to face with anything so cool and eminent for a long time.

Jimmy had hinted to her of a secret, in London; there was something he said he wished to tell her about, would tell her in full later, something that involved much happiness to others, and could it have been this? Could it have been that he was really secretly married? That at last the step of which he had constantly spoken, for which indeed there had been times when together they had half-heartedly planned for it, could it be that the one safeguard for them both had actually been formed by him, and alone? But only a second would she permit this conception of The Dials to obtain hold. "Ridiculous!" she repeated, "ridiculous! Not that I believe a word or any innuendo of the shocking old wizard, but it only shows, it only shows the helplessness of a woman who is not bound to a man, and how entirely the man is free!"

Nothing a man does counts well for him with a woman but those things he does in accordance with her estimate of what his attitude towards her should be! And Bulstrode's high-minded control, the reserve—which since her marriage had been maintained, only counted now against him.

Wasn't she, in it all, rather counting without her host? Their bond was so tacit, so silent, so unworded. Indeed, he had made no bond, had asked her for no pledge. She was tied hand and foot, but he was free. And over that freedom what vague right had she? What dominion could she have? Isn't it, after all, in the life of a clever, delightful man, something not strictly a burden, the

soul-absorbing entire devotion of a woman not too old and more or less not generally disliked? What did it—heavens, but she was analyzing—what did it cost him? Hadn't he always gone from her at a moment's warning, and stopped away for months and months? Imperious as by nature she was, she had always been wise enough to reserve a summons from her that, she had every reason to believe, would fetch him from any distance to her side. She never tested him, she scarcely ever wrote to him; she had been at the Sorghams', and alone for a month, and save for one perfectly delightful day he had not once turned up to keep her company.

As the woman's thoughts encompassed the subject they brought it up to this: that as far as things went, at all events, there was no blame: no matter how society had coupled their names, she had at least the conscience of her acts clear. Jimmy was to be thanked for it from beginning to end; as far as the conscience of her thoughts went, well, those were her own affair. Oh, she could recall skirmishes and narrow impasses! Her tactics had more than once been those only permitted by the codes of battle, and of another passion.

Her chair, which she had left, she passed and repassed as she walked up and down, trailing her soft dress across the floor. She stood before the fire, her foot held out to the fervent flame.

Her face softened as there came out clearly to her the real picture of Jimmy that always kept itself somewhere between her eyes and her brain. Ah, there were men of talent and fashion, who did not hesitate to make merry, who were more or less good, more or less anti-pathetic, and for whom society never had a word of reproach—but Jimmy! distinguished and charming, with every taste and means to gratify them, with—so to put it—the woman of his heart at his very doors—how did he live? Why, for everybody in the world but for himself. And through it all, in spite of the fact that he appeared blindly to shut his eyes against their mutual love, he lived for her. Oh, he was the best, the best!

She listened as she stood there for the hum of the motor which might tell her he was coming back. She wanted to ask him to tell her the truth about The Dials. She wanted, above all else, to see him again.

She remembered them, one by one, the happy occasions they had caught and made the most of, and each after the other they became lovely harbors where like ships her thoughts lay at anchor. Penhaven was certainly one of the best. She congratulated herself that she had conceived that day, and without any blame she acknowledged it to herself, that if Jimmy had only wished it they would have been there together now.

She had taken her chair again and sat back deeply in the great fauteuil. The brocade made a dark-hued background against which her head, frankly thrown back, defined its charming lines. Her bare arms folded across her breast, her foot swinging gently to and fro, she continued to muse and dream, and as she thought of Bulstrode, to love him.

Some one came in and piled up the fire and slipped out, but no message was brought her to tell her what had become of her host and her friend.

The long sympathetic silence beginning at the fireside flowed through the vast rooms and corridors, and out into the night, down the lanes and the road until its completeness and tonelessness were broken by the memory of the bells of Penhaven, as she and Jimmy had heard them whilst they rang the angelus in the close. And the discordant note of The Dials was drowned, confused and lost in her intense listening to the Penhaven bells. Some chord or other, or some fine spring touched as she so thought on, brought back to her the fact of the despatch upstairs, which if it had any, had an imperative importance. Falconer had sent it from Palm Beach where he had gone to get rid of a troublesome grippe. He did not, in the few lines which told he was seedy and had put off his sailing, suggest that she should go back. But he would not resent her return, she knew that, he would probably treat her decently for at least a fortnight.

"I don't know a creature," she praised herself, "who would have stayed on with Jack, and nothing but Jimmy has helped me to stick it out. If he really loved me would he have let me go on as I have gone on? I don't know. Unless he loved me could he have helped me at all? I think not."

Round the figure of her friend there began to group, as if for some special purpose, the kindnesses and charities she had seen him display. One by one she added up his gifts and benefits until the poor and outcast and forgotten and despised claimed all of them to be his friends; they gathered round him and in place of the categoric histories of self-love and indulgence, of passion that had in more or less degree characterized the men of her set, these things came till the dawn of them and the light of them made his figure shine. How, she thought, could he ever have been what he so wonderfully is, if he had lived for himself or been anything but the best? Upstairs, in her room, a few hours before, the mark of silver on her hair had been a whip to urge on her rebellion; to tell her to seize and make the most of the fleeting time, to warn her of the age which when her beauty and her youth were gone, was all that could remain for them both. But now there began to blow across her soul a freshness. She had indeed been drawing long breaths in her husband's absence, but free as they were they left her stifled and panting, as if to get the oxygen she had been obliged to climb too far. Now, on the contrary, she was lifted as by wings, and whilst they fluttered about her she breathed evenly yet fully, and the air on the heights was something better than wine.

There is an unspoiled enjoyment in the thing which has never given us pain. It may be a sensual and ecstatic prerogative of passion to make the object suffer, but there is a different sense of happiness in that which never does harm or hurt or wrong to the thing it loves. So she could think of Bulstrode, without pain, without regret, without reproach. And if the ardor and passion in her became suffused and slowly paled, there was a starry brightness, a beauty in her face and in her eyes such as Bulstrode, when he came in to find her waiting, had never seen before.

With every mile of the short run from The Dials back to the castle, Mrs. Falconer's friend had been preparing himself for his meeting with the woman he had left some few hours before. All his emotions culminated in a high, swinging excitement. The fact that he was going back alone to find Mary Falconer there, was the big motif, and as he thought of the dark, charming envelope the castle made, holding the treasure she was, keeping her there for him, his heart beat so high that he knew there was nothing more for him to feel. The ecstasy he had witnessed in the little house his chivalry had purchased, the meeting of the husband and wife, come together there after so much unhappiness, put it poignantly to him that sterile love is a very unsatisfactory thing indeed. And if the highest quality of gallantry is to consider a woman's honor before her love, it at least makes real happiness—so he felt then—impossible in the world.

One false swerve of the motor at the pace they were going, and there would not be any more problems to solve. If he died now he might justly say that he had not lived, he had not lived! Who would give him back what he had missed? The motto on the dials repeated itself to him: *Utere dum licet*.

He pushed into the castle on his arrival, hurried to dress, and went downstairs. It seemed to him as he put aside the portières, that these curtains were at last all there was between himself and her, that he was going home, coming home at last; that ways he had for years seen approaching, met at length to-night here. It was with the very clear realization of the culmination of the time that Bulstrode went in to find his friend.

He had stopped to make himself irreproachable, and expected to find her waiting and friendly and lovely. What, had he found her anything else? But as rising from her chair, the scarf slipping back from her bare shoulders, she put out her hand and greeted him, the dazzling sense that breaks on a man's consciousness when he finds himself alone with the woman he loves, proved for a second that he had need of all his control. He could not speak.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed, "you're as white as a ghost! You look as though you'd been to a wake; and I don't believe you've had a mouthful of dinner."

He remembered that it might be polite to apologize to her for the entire desertion of the household.

"My poor friend, what in Heaven's name must you think of us all!"

"Of you all?" (True enough, there had been another!) She had thought volumes, comedies, tragedies, melodramas, but what she thought didn't so much matter as did the fact that he had not, whatever festivities he had honored, dined. Shouldn't they have something here together before the fire?

"I seem," she said, "to have a blighting effect upon my host."

"My friend Westboro' is the happiest man in Glouceshire."

"Which means that he has found his Duchess?"

"He has found his Duchess."

When her friend entered the room, by the light on his face like the brightness of the morning as he caught sight of her, Mary Falconer saw that for Jimmy Bulstrode she was still the one woman in the world. In the relief that this knowledge brought her she half attempted to play with what had been her suspicions, and to tease him, but this mood passed.

"That's a horrid old parson they chose to have me dine with," she said. "He told me dreadful scandals but I think now that I see through them all. The Duchess of Westboro' has been living incognita at The Dials, hasn't she, and her husband at last found her there?"

Bulstrode acknowledged that she had read the drama correctly. And Mary Falconer laughed.

"Yes, evidently the Duchess has a strong dramatic sense; she's very romantic, isn't she?"

And the man absently exclaimed: "Oh, I dare say, I dare say." Then turning to her with unusual vehemence: "Do, for Heaven's sake leave them and everybody. I want to forget them all."

He threw up his hand with a sort of supplication. He had seated himself on a tapestried stool close beside the chair she had taken again. Using her Christian name for one of the rare times in his life, he pleaded: "Can't we leave all other people, Mary, can't we?"

She looked at him startled and said that their host seemed pretty effectually to have left *them*, rising from her chair with the words, and crossing the room to one of the long windows, drew back the curtain.

The cold glass against which she pressed her cheek sent a shock through her, but she stayed for a second close to the pane as if she would implore the newer transport, the stiller transport, of the icy cold to transfuse her veins.

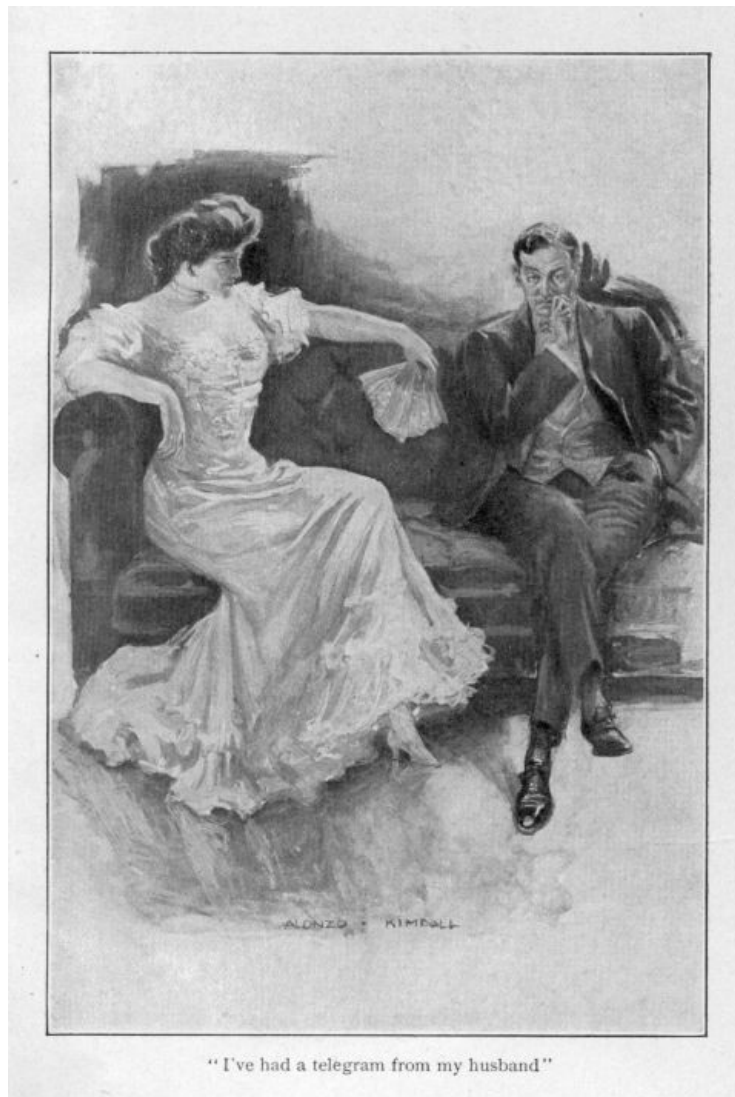
The changed temperature had chased away the fog, and the night spread its serene beauty over the park, where the moonlight lay along the terrace like snow. Far down the slope rose the outlines of the bare trees, and the wide landscape shone and shone until it finally was lost in the mists.

Bulstrode had followed over and stood by Mary Falconer's side, and the scene before him seemed full of joy, full of gifts, full of largesse. The ornament on the woman's bosom stirred with her breathing, shot a million fine sparkles, and below it the spray of mistletoe rose and fell, rose and fell.

He put his hand out and took the spray and fastened it in his buttonhole, saying that the mistletoe was above her head.

His voice, one she had never heard, made her unwisely turn to meet his eyes, to shake with the emotion of the adventurer trembling on the edge of the precipice; just to hang over which, and to shudder, he has climbed high. She put her hand out between them, holding him back.

"I've had a telegram from my husband. He's very ill. He's in Palm Beach and I'm going over to him next week."



"I've had a telegram from my husband"

Falconer's name was sovereign for breaking spells as far as Jimmy was concerned, but the wife's phrase this time gave him only a more violent revelation of his cruel hope. She went on:

"It's not alarming, but with a heart like Jack's, anything might happen. It's only when I'm with him that he keeps up any sort of shape."

The fact of his holding in his the hand that she had put out to keep him from her, did not serve to aid in a serene continuation of her plans, and the silence became a burden which if she

did not herself lift would crush her.

She said hurriedly: "And you will help me to go."

And then Bulstrode spoke: "No," he said, "Oh, no."

For the briefest space she yielded to what he meant and was at last wicked enough and human enough to promise to do. But she had on this solemn evening—for it had so been—come too far, gone up too high to drag down all the way with him on a single word. In supremest happiness, however, at what he said and how he said it, she gave a little soft laugh, and although she was under the mistletoe, she felt that she looked down on him, loving him so much more than in adorable weakness he had suddenly grown small and dear.

"Oh, Jimmy," she whispered, "how heavenly of you, but you can't go back on ten years in one week. You can't, you know! You've thrown me like a giant so *far*, I've gone right on up."

Still looking at her he shook his head as she repeated: "You'll help me, you'll help me! You can't go back!"

"I *can* go back," he said deeply, "*on everything and everybody in the world.*"

At the frank simple words, and the sense of what they meant, at the sound of his new voice, it was as if all the dykes at last were down; and strong, bright, but most beautiful, the sea came rushing in. As she saw him coming toward her and knew that in a moment more she would be in his arms, and that at his first touch she would let everything go, she found one word to say and it proved only to be his name:

"Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy!"

But there was in it an appeal. She could count the times she had wept in her life, very nearly, she had often said that a woman weeps only when she has nothing else to do, and there had always been so much, every minute in her life; and as if in logical affirmation there seemed now for her nothing to do but to cry. The tears which covered her face and fell into her palms and against the chair on which she leaned, comforted her in a measure and served to loosen the tension of her mind. She had succeeded in miraculously keeping away from him, just within touch of her, held back by a hand whose white gentleness was not so exquisitely strong but that he loved her too well to break the tender barrier. She never afterward knew what appeals she made or how she besought, but it must have been of great force to keep him so transfixed and pale.

"Oh, you *have* told me over and over again! Do you think I am deaf or blind, or that I have found you dumb? Such love, Jimmy, such high, sweet perfectness! Why, there isn't a woman in a million who has known it or even dreamed what such love could mean. Why, there hasn't been a day or an hour for ten years that you have not spoken it to me in the most adorable way, in the most beautiful way; and in every kind thing you have done, in every foolish, dear thing, I have been so vain as to think that I counted for something in it, that you did it a little for me. Other women have had their lovers, their scandals, their great passions. But I have had you without flaw, without a change, without regret. Hush!" she cried, wiping her tears away, "Hush. It's quite safe to let me go on. The only fear is that *you* may speak."

The arm which she had held out to keep him from her had fallen upon his shoulder, lay about his neck as he knelt by her chair.

"It's been horrible!" she said, shaking her head, "Horrible—the days and the nights, the days and the nights! There have been times when I could have killed him and killed myself as well. But then you've come, and your presence has helped me, and that's the way I've pulled along; because by your silence you told me to pull along, because by the fact that you didn't speak I understood that you thought I should be brave, and I have been—thanks to you, and I shall be—thanks to you! Oh!" she cried passionately, "if you think because I am saying it all out that I want to go back, that I don't see what I am running away from, and what you mean, you're cruel, you're cruel!"

Her other hand had found its fellow and they both lay on his shoulders.

"I only think of you," he breathed, "and of how..."

She covered his lips. "Oh, hush, hush, you have told me, in the only way there was to tell. I'm too stupid to be able to combine a lover and a husband. The day and the hour you spoke I should never have seen my husband again. And that's where it stands; that's how it is, and you know it. You loved me because I was like that, and I love you because you are the bravest of the brave. There you are!" she cried, and drew away from him triumphantly, letting her arms fall. "There we both are!"

"Have you any vague conception of what this is for me?" Bulstrode asked.

"Oh, I dare say," she exclaimed, with a kind of petulance, "that I am only thinking of my own bewildering happiness. There," she exclaimed at his face, "I see you have a new weapon: pity. Oh, don't use that against me, and I warn you that everything in the world will crumble if you speak."

Her hands, which he was holding closely, she drew from him and laid them both on his breast and met his eyes full with her own. Her lips were slightly trembling, and she was as white as a winter day. In the moment of silence they passed like this, she seemed to him like some great precious pearl, some priceless rose fragrant, lustrous, made for him, gathered for him, and yet beyond his right. She seemed, above all, the woman, the mate; her glorious sex, her tenderness, her humanness, drew him and dazzled him; and, nevertheless, through his daze and over his desire, he heard with his finest her cry:

"Jimmy, Jimmy, don't speak, don't speak. Ah, if you really love me..."

He really loved her. Rising from where he knelt by her chair, Bulstrode went over, stood a second by the chimney-piece, and then took a few paces up and down the room, came back to her and said the thing the real man says to the woman he really loves:

"I want to make you happy, Mary. I will do whatever you wish me to do."

"Ah, then, go!"

Bulstrode looked wearily about as though of its own accord a door might unclose or a portière lift.

"Go where, pray, at this time of night, or morning?"

"Oh, to The Dials. Ring for a motor; they will take you in again; or go to the rector's."

The last of the fire had flared up. The flame went out.

Sinking back in her chair, she waited in a tranced stillness, her eyes on the ashes of the fire. She had said her say out, perhaps the man knew it, and as she leaned back in the cushions he saw how completely it all lay with him at the end. She thought he came back and waited a second at her side; she thought he bent a moment over her, but she did not stir until the cold wind from an opening door, till the clicking of a latch made her start, and then she turned to see that he had gone.

Bulstrode came back to the castle Christmas Day at nine o'clock. But the hour had the effect of being much earlier. The winter morning panoplied with festivity began its life slowly, and not all the day's brightness through which he had speeded his motor had yet come into the house. Bulstrode, drawn by it, went directly back to the room he had left several hours before, as though he expected still to find the woman he loved sitting before the extinguished fire.

Two parlor maids were whisking their skirts and dusters out of the opposite door, a footman at their heels. Touches of the inevitable order which reduces an agreeable disarray to the impersonal had already been put to the scene of Jimmy's tenderness, and the curtains drawn well away from the long windows let in the morning that entered broadly and fell across the hearth and the fresh-lit fire.

Clean logs replaced the cold ashes: the match had just finished with the kindlings, and Bulstrode went over to welcome the crackling of the young blaze. The absence of his host, the castle once more handed over to him for the time, gave him a feeling of proprietorship in the bright cordial room, but looking up at the portraits of Westboro's in puffs and velvets, Jimmy couldn't find an ancestor! Their amours and indulgences had written brilliant and amusing history; the gentlemen had gone mad at ladies' carriage wheels, they had carried off their scandals with the highest of hands, and still held their heads well. They had carved and raped and loved their way down to the present time, and were none the less a proud line of pure British blood. The American bachelor, about whose fine head nothing picturesque or worthy of history circled, looked up at the Dukes of Westboro' musingly, and there was not a peer or a noble better to look upon or who had been at heart a truer lover, although he did not know it.

During the lapse of time between leaving this same room and his present return, Bulstrode had not tossed on a sleepless bed; he had slept soundly, and during his rest the several dials had called out like bells, their voice, *Utere dum licet*; and finally a real bell had roused him to the fact that it was day, a new day, and that unless he was killed en route to the castle, nothing could keep him from the place and from her.

He had no consolation in the fact that the honor and decency of society were by him strengthened and retained, nor did he plan out the sane, wise project of not seeing her again. Nor did he weigh or balance his charge or responsibility. There had been a cessation of vibration of any kind, and only one supreme, sovereign reality took possession of the world and of himself, and the limitless beauty and the limitless delight he had breathed in ever since he left her and knew how she loved him. Nothing in life, he had so felt, could dull or tarnish the glory of her face; nothing, no matter what life held for them both, could efface the touch she had laid upon him, as her arms were about him. Through the interval his past life appeared to have been, on through the new and un-lived interval to come, she would be as last night she had been, she would look at him as last night she had looked. "Heavens!" he meditated, in the faces of the self-indulgent, cynical Westboro's, "I am not going to be blasé through six paradises just because there happens

to be a seventh!"

A new fire spun its lilac flames behind his back. The spicy breath of the wreaths of hemlock was deliciously sweet. Little by little the sun had made its eastern way and sparkled at the pane outside, and in the radiant clarity the terrace and its charming railing, the urns with the little cedars, stood out clearly; and more than all else, the truth cried itself to him, that whatever happened, she was still here, still in the house with him.

He had chosen a Christmas gift for her in London, and determined to send it up to her now with some roses, and in this way to announce the fact that he had come back from The Dials and was ready to use the day as she liked. He felt only how beautiful it would be to see her, that it did not for a second occur to him to wonder if she on her part would feel a certain embarrassment.

In answer to his ring, not a man servant, but the perfect housekeeper rustled in, her crisp silks, her cameos, and her "Christmas face," as one of the little Westboro' chaps had called her rosy countenance, on one of his few Christmas days.

"Where would Mr. Bulstrode please to have breakfast?"

"Why, wherever it best suited, went with the house, with the day. Where, indeed, and that was more to the point, would Mrs. Falconer have it?"

"Mrs. Falconer? Why, Mr. Bulstrode didn't know then that Mrs. Falconer had gone?"

She saw by his face that he knew nothing less in the world.

Why, directly the despatch had been fetched over from the Abbey station. There had been but twenty minutes between the getting of it and her starting away. A motor had been sent with her and the maid, and Mrs. Falconer had fortunately been able to make the train; the only one, it so happened, being Christmas Day, that connected with the Dover and Calais special.

The matter-of-fact bit of news came to Bulstrode so coldly and so ruthlessly that it took some seconds for the bitter thought that she had gone because she couldn't trust him, to penetrate. Then this gave place to an effulgent hope that it might be *herself* she couldn't trust! But the discovery that she had left him no message of any kind, and that she was above all irrevocably gone, struck him more cruelly than had any blow in his kindly life. He could not suffer in peace before the bland creature in silks and cameos. Crises and departures, battle, murder, and sudden death, he felt the housekeeper would accept serenely should any of them chance to occur at Westboro', and above all if they were part of the sacred family history. But Mrs. Falconer and he were not Westboro's, and he wanted to be rid of his companion and to find himself alone in order to consult time tables, to find out why it had been imperative to go to Calais, with what boat for America a Christmas-Day train could possibly connect, and to turn it all over in his mind. He at first believed that there had never been any telegram and that she had only employed a polite ruse in order to facilitate her flight.

Why, at all events, couldn't she have left him a line? She might, he ruefully complained, have strained a point and wished him a Merry Christmas! As he walked to and fro in the room now supremely deserted, he began slowly to approach a certain hypothesis which as soon as he granted, he as violently discarded. But the thought was imperious: something of its kind always haunted him like a bad ghost. It could usually be dismissed, but now it was persistent. A despatch from Falconer had certainly come the night before. Another might have followed on this morning, hard upon it? To have been sent over from the Abbey on a holiday must have been a very grave message indeed; "a matter," as the old term went, "of life and death." The phrase began to repeat itself and the conviction to grow, and as he was obliged to give it admittance and to face it, and to wonder what the shock would be to her, and what the news would be to him, how it would change things, and how they would both meet it—his promenade to and fro in the room brought him up before the centre table and he looked down upon it at length with a seeing eye. Why not? why not? he was wondering. We are all essentially mortal, and lightning never had struck yet, *why not in this place?* And since there had been neither shame nor blame, why couldn't he face the possibility of a perfectly natural mortality? Before him on the table lay Mrs. Falconer's green scarf, and as Bulstrode lifted the soft thing he saw that underneath it lay a despatch.

Then he knew instantly that Mary Falconer had left both scarf and telegram there, and that this was her message to him. He seemed, as the word he had not yet read met him in this form, to have been waiting all his life for just this news. The road, so long in winding home, had wound home at length, and now that he believed the crisis was really reached, there was something infinitely stilling in its solemnity.

Bulstrode could not at once draw the sheet from its envelope. He lit a cigar and sat down before the fire.

He knew, as though he saw it all before his eyes, how the despatch had found her this early Christmas Day, in her room—he knew how she had read it first and borne it well—for she was a brave, strong woman—he knew that his absence had been a relief to her. He knew how she had worn her long, dark cloak and thick veil, and had gone out to travel home alone. Oh, he knew her, and as he thought of the picture she had made, and how she would begin her sad and dreadful journey, he for the first time thought of himself—of themselves. He was too human not to know

that there would be a future and that they would build anew. In the new house there would be no driftwood now; nor would they ever be haunted by the sound of a bell in the dark, for with the few brave souls who sail across the seas of life they had both of them stood by the sinking ship until it put into port.

Mrs. Shawles came in again presently and told him that she had laid his breakfast in the little room facing the gardens. Then she waited, and as Bulstrode looked up at her he forced himself to smile faintly and wished her a Merry Christmas.

She thanked him, gave him many, and said it was a happy morning for all of the Westboro's, and that the castle and the house would see new times and better things, and when he had stirred himself to the point of putting what he had for her into her hand, he was not sure whether he wanted her to go, or not, this time and leave him alone.

She still hesitated. It was a custom with them, she told him, with the Westboro's, to have hall prayers on holidays. When the Duke himself was there, he always read them; the servants and the children of the place had already come in. In the absence of the family *would* Mr. Bulstrode...?

"Oh, no, on no account, on no account," he hurried. "Wasn't there some one else?"

"Well, to be sure, there was Portman."

The guest was sure that Portman would do it quite in the proper way, and as for himself, he would have his breakfast in a few moments, he thanked her.

And Mrs. Shawles, who had expected a more favorable answer, left open on the table the little Book which she had brought in with her.

Bulstrode took it up after she was gone.

In a few seconds he heard from the distance the sound of the children singing. Their voices ceased, to be followed by the subdued murmur of reading. As Bulstrode opened the Book he held, the leaves fell apart at the marriage rite. He hurriedly passed this over, and his eyes were arrested by the opening lines of a more solemn service. He paused to read the beautiful, pitiful words, and then, still with the open Book in his hands, he drew the telegram out of its cover....

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SENTIMENTAL ADVENTURES OF JIMMY
BULSTRODE ***

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