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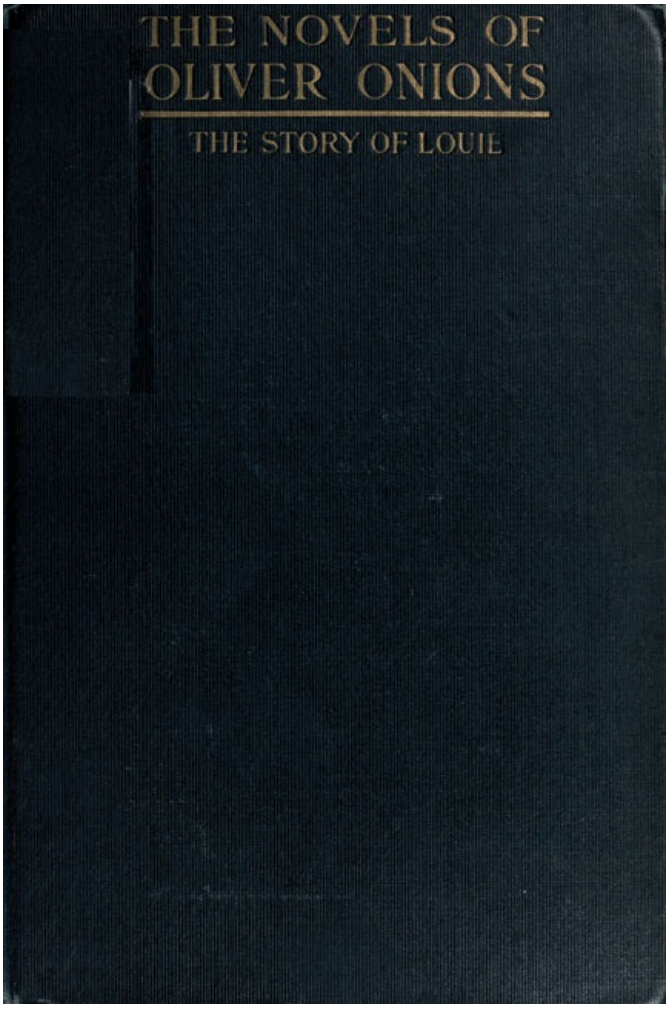

THE STORY OF LOUIE

BY OLIVER ONIONS

Author of "In Accordance With the Evidence," "The Debit Account," etc.

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TO
GWLADYS

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

I

In an old number of *Punch*, under the heading "Society's New Pet: The Artist's Model," is to be found a drawing by Du Maurier, of which the descriptive text runs:

> "And how did you and Mr. Sopley come to quarrel, dear Miss Dragon?"

> "Well, your Grace, it was like this: I was sitting to him in a cestus for 'The Judgment of Paris,' when someone called as wished to see him most particular; so he said: 'Don't move, Miss Dragon, or you'll disturb the cestus.' 'Very good, sir,' I said, and off he went; and when he come back in an hour and a 'alf or so he said: 'You've moved, Miss Dragon!' 'I 'aven't!' I said. 'You '*ave*!' he said. 'I 'AVEN'T!' I said—and no more I 'adn't, your Grace. And with that I off with his cestus an' wished him good-morning, an' I never been near him since!"

Du Maurier may or may not have been wrong about the newness of this craze of "Society's." If he was right, the Honourable Emily Scarisbrick becomes at once a pioneer. Let there be set down, here in the beginning, the plain facts of how, a good ten years before the indignant Miss Dragon "offed with" Mr. Sopley's cestus, the Honourable Emily found a way to bridge the gulf that lies between Bohemia and Mayfair. 10

Except in the case of one person not yet born into these pages, the report that the lady had engaged herself, early in the year 1869, to "Mr. Buckley, her drawing-master," had only a short currency. It was probably devised by the Honourable Emily herself in order to soften the blow for her brother, Lord Moone. The real name of the man to whom she engaged herself was James Buckley Causton. Under this name he appears on the rolls of the 4th Dragoon Guards as a trooper in the years 1862-1867; and as "Buck" Causton he attained some celebrity when, in the last-named year, he vanquished one Piker Betteridge in the prize ring, in a battle which, beginning with gloves and ending with bare knuckles, lasted for nearly nine hours.

For all we know, it may have been Miss Dragon's Mr. Sopley who, seeing the magnificent Buck in the ring, first put it into the ex-trooper's head to become an artists' model. However it was, an artists' model he did become, and, as such, the rage. No doubt Sopley, if it were he, would gladly have kept his discovery to himself; but a neck like a sycamore and a thorax capable of containing nine-hours-contest lungs cannot be hid when Academy time comes round. Sopley's measure was known. If Sopley painted an heroic picture it was certain he had had a hero as model. The Academy opens in May; before June was out Sopley's find was no longer his own. Sir Frederick Henson, the artist who moved so in the world that in him the tradition of the monarch who picked up the painter's brush for him might almost have been said to live again, saw Buck, marked Buck down as his own, and presently had sole possession of Buck.

The Honourable Emily Scarisbrick already had possession of Sir Frederick. To be sure, it neither needed a Sir Frederick Henson to teach her the stippling of birds' eggs and the copying of castles 11
for the albums of her friends, nor was the great Academician accustomed to stooping to the office of salaried drawing-master; but—the Honourable Emily was a Scarisbrick, of Mallard Bois.

In Henson's studio the Honourable Emily first saw Buck Causton.

To say that she fell in love with him would demand a definition of the term. Certainly she fell in something with him. Perhaps that something was the something that at the last thrusts baronies and Mallard Boises aside as hindrances to a design even larger than that in which they play so important a part; but we have nothing to do with large designs here. Call it what you will: something proper enough to legend, but of little enough propriety in a modern lady's life; a feeble echo of Romance, perhaps, but never itself to become Romance unless, of it or present scandal, it should prove the stronger. At any rate, it was a very different thing from anything she felt, or ever had felt, for Captain Cecil Chaffinger, of the White Hussars, her brother's nominee for her hand.

It was a word dropped by the gallant Captain, himself a follower of the fancy, that led her to the discovery that the hero of some feat or other of extraordinary skill and endurance, and the young Ajax, all chest and grey eyes and brown curls, who did odd jobs about the studio in the intervals of posing for Henson's demigodlike canvases, were one and the same person. Her already throbbing pulse bounded. She herself was twenty-eight, a small, dark, febrile woman, given over to discontents based on nothing save on an irremediably spoiled childhood, and perhaps hankering after an indiscretion in the conviction that indiscretions were of two kinds— 12
indiscretions, and the indiscretions of the Scarisbricks. Naturally she became conscious of a quickened interest in her art.

The first indication that this interest passed beyond birds eggs and castles was that she began "Lessons in Drapery." If here for a few moments her story becomes a little technical, it may be none the less interesting on that account.

The study of Drapery *as* Drapery has not much interest for anybody unless perhaps for a student of mechanics. For all that, it is, or then was, regarded by drawing-masters as a self-contained subject, to be tackled, ticked off, and thenceforward possessed. To the study of Drapery in this unrelated sense the Honourable Emily apparently inclined. Seeing her therefore, in this fundamental error, Sir Frederick, a master of Drapery, took from her the "copies" which had already supplanted the "copies" of castles in her portfolio, and good-humouredly began to tell her what she really wanted. What she really wanted, he said, was to rid her mind of the idea that folds existed for their own sake, and to endeavour to realise that their real significance lay in the thing enfolded. Miss Scarisbrick thanked him.

So, at first from the lay figure, and then from Henson's model, she began to draw Drapery with special reference to the thing draped.

About this time she gave Captain Chaffinger for an answer a "No" which he refused to take. His devotion, he said, forbade him. If by his devotion he meant his devotion to his creditors, his

constancy remained at their service. In the meantime he was still able to pay his old debts by contracting new ones.

The Honourable Emily's studies became diligent. 13

There is little to be said about these things except that they do happen. A word now about Buck's attitude.

Had the Honourable Emily's maid thrown herself at his head he would have known what to do. His sense of the holiness of social degrees would have received no shock. But the Honourable Emily, who could command her maid, could not command what in all probability her maid would not have had to ask twice for. The most she got (when after much that is omitted here, it did at last dawn on the bashful Buck that she had any will in the matter at all) was a blush so sudden and violent that it compelled an embarrassed reddening of her own cheeks also. Buck was not personally outraged. It was his sense of Order that was outraged. He remembered the lady's station for her, and, stammeringly but reverentially, put her back into it.

Now to be merely reverential to a woman who is in love with you is to provoke impatience, anger and tears. On the other hand, to see a woman in tears because you will not permit her to humiliate herself is to have the other half of an impossible situation. It was one luncheon-time (the Honourable Emily now lunched frequently at the studio) that the tears came.

"Oh, you don't care for me—you don't care for me!" she sobbed.

Buck could not truthfully have said that he did care for her; but there she was before him, in tears.

"If it were that Dragon girl, now——"

Buck, while not failing to see the force of this, could only make imploring movements for the Honourable Emily to calm herself. Presently she did calm herself, sufficiently to change her tone to one of irony. 14

"Do you read your Bible?" she shot over her shoulder.

"Yes, miss," said Buck—"that is—I mean——"

The reason for Buck's hesitation was that he had suddenly doubted whether the Honourable Emily would know a Racing Calendar by the name she had just used.

"Do you mean *The* Bible, miss?" he said, fidgeting.

She snapped: "Yes—the one with the story of Joseph in it——"

She burst into tears anew.

"Oh, that I should have to beg a man to marry me! I hate myself—I hate you!"

Her hatred, however, did not prevent repetitions of the scene. At the last repetition that need trouble us here her tears conquered. The helpless Buck comforted her after the only fashion he knew anything about—the fashion he would have used towards her maid—on his knee.

He still, however, called her "Miss."

They were privately married in the June of 1869.

"*Don't* call me 'Miss'!" she broke out petulantly one day in the middle of the honeymoon. "And you are *not* to have your meals with the servants! I shall lunch in my room to-day, and you are to be ready to take me out at three o'clock."

"Yes, m'm," said Buck.

Probably Lord Moone had less to do than he supposed with the separation that took place in the September of the same year. We may assume that a much more potent factor was the Honourable Mrs. Causton's remembrance of her own words, "That I should have to beg a man to marry me! I hate myself—I hate you!" She did very soon hate both herself and him. Poor Buck merely hated the whole subversive anomaly. 15

He accepted the proposal that they should separate with perfect docility. It seemed to him entirely right. Indeed the only thing he had not accepted with docility had been his introduction to Lord Moone, on the only occasion on which the two men ever met, as "Mr. Buckley, the drawing-master." Buck hadn't liked that much. He had made himself Buck Causton in nine hours of terrific combat, and as Buck Causton he preferred to be known. But all else he suffered with touching obedience, and at the proposal that they should go their several ways his finger flew to his forehead.

"Yes, miss," he said; and his heart, if not his lips, murmured the prayer that begins: "God bless the Squire and his relations——"

They parted.

They only met once more. This was in the January of the following year, in the great antlered hall

at Mallard Bois, that was as regularly used on all occasions as if there had not been salons and galleries and drawing-rooms in a dozen other parts of the great place. The Honourable Mrs. Causton lay on a couch drawn up to the fire-dogs; her husband looked submissively down on her, dwarfing the suit of armour of Big Hugo by which he stood.

She made a new proposal. It was that he should put it into her hands to set herself free once for all.

"Yes, miss," said Buck.

"Then," said the Honourable Mrs. Causton a quarter of an hour later, "there's the question of cruelty."

Buck's thoughts wandered slowly back to the Piker. 16

"Yes, miss," he said.

"I need hardly tell you that as far as—er—procedure—can be stretched it will be stretched."

"Yes, miss. Thank you, miss."

Then wistfully Buck's eyes wandered from Big Hugo's suit of armour to his wife's face again.

"Beg your pardon, about that cruelty, miss," he said unhappily. "Couldn't I go down—just for once, Miss—as Mr. Buckley?"

"No; but I can assure you that *I* don't want this talked about more than must be either. Perhaps I ought to tell you that I shall probably marry again."

Buck's finger went to his forehead again, this time in a duty to his successor. Then his eyes grew grave. His wife had made a slight movement.

"If I might make so bold, miss—there's another thing——"

She knew what he meant.

"You've nothing to do with that," she said quickly.

Buck would have thought that he had, but if a lady said he hadn't, well, he hadn't, that was all.

"Yes, miss.... And asking your pardon again—about that cruelty?"

"Oh, that's over," said Mrs. Causton, closing her eyes. "Six months ago."

"I—I don't remember," said Buck; but once more, if a lady said it was so, so it was. Again the grave look came into his eyes, and again she understood.

"I can have it looked after better than you can," she said.

"And—please—you will?" he dared to supplicate.

She nodded. 17

Still he hesitated.

"If it's a little boy, miss—I might be opening a Sparring Academy—strictly for the gentry—I wouldn't charge him nothing——"

And after a little further discussion the shameful piece of collusion came to an end.

They were divorced in the March of 1870. On the 15th of April the child was born—a girl. Fifteen months later the Honourable Emily married Captain Cecil Chaffinger, of the White Hussars.

II

The child never got on well with her mother. Mrs. Chaffinger never forgave her her paternity. The gallant Captain, on the other hand, treated her as he would have treated his own child—that is to say, he bought her extravagant toys if the proximity of a toyshop put it into his head to do so, pinched her arms and cheeks and neck jocularly whenever he found her head at the level of his waistcoat, and then departed, as likely as not to pinch maturer arms and necks, not Mrs. Chaffinger's, elsewhere. He took his wife's former *mésalliance* with perfect serenity. She had paid his debts and enabled him to spend a day or two in his father's house when he cared to do so, and the Captain, who was a gentleman and not very much else to boast of, held faithfully to his part of the bargain. He even dropped in once or twice at Buck Causton's new *Salle d'Armes* in Bruton Street. The child was called by his name—Louise Chaffinger; he called her Mops, because of her quantities of thick brown hair. The Honourable Emily became querulous and an invalid; took to falling into dozes no matter who was present, and waking up again with alarming cries; 18 and she busied herself with charitable works performed in an uncharitable temper.

Louie was not pretty; but the jocular Captain pinched no prettier neck than hers, and he declared, as the child grew, that her "points" would be best displayed could she go about in the largest and shadiest hat and the most closely fitting tights possible. His house (which, by the

way, he had begun to encumber again) was Trant, in Buckinghamshire; but the child was packed off occasionally, to be rid of her, to Mallard Bois, Lord Moone's seat, there to romp with her cousin, Eric Scarisbrick, already preparing for Eton, and such small fry as climbed trees and cheeked the gardeners with him. Here she revelled in the liberty that was denied her at home; and perhaps she already realised instinctively that her mother's relief at having her out of the way was tempered only by the invalid's resentment that the child could be happy out of her own not very cheerful company. Be that as it may, the girl was told, at twelve years of age, that she was getting too big to kick these limbs her stepfather so admired about among growing boys. She was given half-long skirts and French and English governesses: the French one, though she did not yet know it, as a preparation for sending her to a Paris convent.

At fourteen years of age she had not heard of the man whose grey eyes and perfect shapeliness of body she inherited. The Scarisbricks, be sure, had allowed that episode to be hushed up. But the day was bound to come when she should hear of the Honourable Mrs. Causton and identify that lady with her mother. The day did come, no matter how; and, inwardly trembling but outwardly resolved, she sought her mother. Mrs. Chaffinger had just come with a cry out of a doze. Her 19
daughter demanded to be told who the Honourable Mrs. Causton was. She was told that there was no such person.

"Then who was she?" the girl demanded. There were few of her questions to her mother that were not demands.

"Who's been telling you about her?"

That did not seem to Louie to matter. She repeated the question.

"She was a very great fool," Mrs. Chaffinger snapped. "Why aren't you with Mademoiselle?"

"Who was she besides being a very great fool?" the child persisted.

It had to come out.

"Then papa *isn't* my father?" Louie said, pale. All through her life she was pale in her moments of stress.

"I'm your mother, and I tell you to go to your French lesson at once."

But Louie did not move.

"Then who was my father?" she asked.

"Who do you suppose he is, when I was Mrs. Causton?"

"Is?... Then he isn't dead?"

Mrs. Chaffinger compressed her lips.

"I was going to tell you all about Mr. Causton all in good time" (her daughter looked coldly unbelieving), "but since you are here I'll tell you now. Sit down on that chair and stop fidgeting ——"

And she told the girl the facts, not to be denied, of the divorcing of Buck.

The end of the matter was that Louie now hated, not only her mother, but her father also.

Her stepfather she thenceforward addressed as "Chaff." He liked it. 20

Three months later she was sent to Paris.

Eight months later still she turned up again, not at Trant, but at the Captain's club in London. She announced that she had run away from the convent and did not intend to return to it. Her arrival, though not unwelcome, was inopportune, for the Captain had a little party that evening and seemed disconcerted. The toyshops, he reflected, were closed, and then he looked at his stepdaughter again.... It could not, after all, have been one of the more characteristic of the Captain's parties, for he took Louie to it, pigtail and all, and for a whole evening pinched nobody. Then he took her to his chambers, winked at his man in token of something extraordinary, hesitated, and then, with an "Oh, be hanged to it!" expression, gave Louie the key of his own sleeping apartment. Louie examined his prints a little wonderingly, but approved of his ribboned haircurlers and large frilled pincushion, and then went to sleep. The next day the Captain took her down to Trant and left her there.

The next few years were a constant succession of wrangles with her mother. She had flatly refused to return to the convent, and if the Honourable Emily was petulant, her daughter was merciless. She had been put off with the drawing-master version of her mother's marriage, but that was enough; she held it over her mother's head, and Buck, if he had desired revenge, had it. She knew herself to be hybrid, and treated the Scarisbricks and their drawing-masters with equal scorn. Worse, she treated them equally with a contemptuous tolerance. She harped with pride on the baser strain. In a word, there was no doing anything with her.

She reached the age of twenty-one. 21

At twenty-two she expressed a wish to go on the stage. The Captain, who was genuinely fond of her, stopped that. At twenty-three she declared plainly that "a girl in her position" ought to have

a means of earning her own living—not necessarily drawing. The Captain being averse from this also, she took the matter into her own hands by writing to the secretary of a Horticultural College in Somersetshire, paying her fees, and enrolling herself as a student without saying a word to anybody. She packed her boxes, and in the second week of January 1894 presented herself before her mother, dressed for travelling, and announced that she had very little time in which to catch her train.

"Oh, by the way," she said, turning at the door, "if you write, you might address letters to me in my own name—Causton."

Then she left.

"*Was die Mutter träumt, das vollbringt die Tochter.*" Here, with its repetitions of and its departures from that of the Honourable Emily, follows her story.

PART I
RAINHAM PARVA

I

The Horticultural College at Rainham Parva, now defunct, was hardly a college in the modern sense at all. Its technical books were antiquated; it had only one or two old microscopes; and it totally lacked the newer trimmings of specialisation. Its founder, a Bristol seedsman called Chesson, had bought the place cheaply, house and all, a dozen years before, and having five hardy daughters eating their heads off at home, had, as the saying is, economically emancipated them. That meant then (whatever it may mean now) that, realising that the wages of two men and a boy might be saved, he had had them down to Rainham Parva and had set them to work.

The second Miss Chesson, Miss Harriet, had shown a real aptitude for the work. She had won, after three years, a Diploma, and this Diploma, together with the presence in the house as paying boarder of a niece of Chesson's, had put an idea into the seedsman's head—the premium idea. With the Diploma properly advertised, its grantee made Principal, a premium or so forgone (called a Scholarship) and the proper person installed over all as Lady-in-Charge, Chesson had foreseen a good deal of his work being done by young women who would pay for the privilege of being allowed to do it. There is no need to describe the development of the idea. The enterprise had prospered, and when Louie Causton had put her name down on the books and paid her fees the complement of thirty girls was full.

She did not, after all, travel down alone. Her stepfather, hinting that it was not necessary to say anything about this to her mother, made the journey with her. The pair of them shortened the hours by guessing which of the young women in the same train were to be Louie's fellow-students; and when they alighted at Rainham Magna station the Captain put Louie and her traps into one of the nondescript vehicles that only saw the light when the Rainham girls arrived or departed, and drove off with her to the college. There he shook hands with the Lady-in-Charge, Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, and asked her whether she was related to Lovenant-Smith of the 24th. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's reply did not actually affirm her regret that she was so related, but the Captain's affability dried up suddenly. He was returning to town by the four-o'clock train; before doing so he took a turn round the place with Louie.

"Well," he said, as Louie took her leave of him at the gates, "it's a good growing country, I should say; rum idea of yours though.... You've heard me speak of Lovenant-Smith, haven't you? Adjutant eight or nine years ago; not a bad chap at all, *I* should have said. She'll be one of the Shropshire lot, I expect. I knew he had people down there.... Well, mind you don't run away with a gardener. 'Bye, Mops——"

And he was off, tugging at his moustache and inwardly commenting that the whole escapade was "just like Louie."

It was a good growing country. Chesson said that the mildness of the winters was due to the Gulf Stream; Miss Harriet Chesson attributed it to ozone—ozone having been a word to conjure with at the time when she had taken her Diploma. Ozone or Gulf Stream, it provided wild violets in December, lemon-verbena that grew in trees up the sides of the cottages and had to be cut away from the upper windows, and filled the deep lanes with the hart's-tongue fern. It also brought forth rich produce. The dairy business and poultry farm flourished; crates and parcels and returned empties kept the goods clerk at Rainham Magna station busy; and, when the heather bloomed on the hill that rose between Chesson's and the sea, the "Rainham Heather Honey," green as bronze and thick as glue, was at a premium. At the crest of the hill the seedsman's estate ended. Beyond that, dropping abruptly to the west, lay deep wooded coombes, green to the very rocks of the shore.

Louie's age put her at once out of the class of the "new girl" who, in the school tales, sits pathetically on her box and waits for somebody to speak to her. She was twenty-four, and probably only one other student, the copper-haired girl with the long thin neck and the "salt-cellars" showing through her white flannel blouse, who asked her her number and offered to show her the way to her cubicle, was more than twenty-two. Her large black feathered hat (see the first part of the Captain's advice as to how she would make the most of herself), and her expensively simple navy blue coat and skirt down to her toes, further distinguished her among the tweed jackets and ankle-length skirts of the younger girls. No doubt she had her perfect management of these and her numerous other garments from her mother's former interest in the study of Drapery. If the Captain did not think her face pretty, it must be remembered that the Captain had standards of prettiness of his own. Pretty in the professional-beauty sense her irregular mouth and long chin perhaps were not. Her large, clear, pebble-grey eyes at any rate were arresting. 28

The copper-haired girl, having shown Louie her cubicle, offered to show her the rest of the house also. They began upstairs on the first floor, where the girls slept. The place was an old mansion in the form of a hollow square, and as they came to each latticed embrasure Louie stopped to look at the famous Rainham yew that almost filled the grassgrown inner courtyard. The corridors were dark, and sudden steps where no steps were to have been expected made of the uneven floors a series of booby-traps for those not familiar with them. Memories of the Monmouth Rebellion seemed to linger round the corners and to be shut up in the cupboards of the place. They passed downstairs. Through the doorway of the handsome Restoration façade they saw the yew again, dark beyond the shining flags of the hall. Louie had already been in the reception-room and Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's private apartments on the right of the doorway; on the left, she was told, were the quarters of Miss Harriet (who alone of Chesson's daughters remained there) and the staff. The domestics slept at the top of the house; the four male gardeners (all married) occupied the farm a furlong away at the back.

"But wouldn't you like some tea?" said the copper-haired girl. "It's in the dining-room."

"I was told to report myself to Miss Chesson at five," said Louie, looking at her watch.

"Well, you've just time, if you're quick——"

They sought the room where the housekeeper ran cups of tea from the tap of a large and funereal bronze urn.

It was ten minutes to five when Louie entered the dining-room. Before the clock had struck five she had taken a certain position in the college. 29

She herself hardly knew how it happened. The room was full of noise and chatter, and near Louie, talking louder and making more noise than anybody else, was a lanky child of sixteen, to be a tall blonde beauty in another three or four years' time, but so far only a mass of unadjusted proportions and movements that lacked co-ordination. She had several distinct voices, and in one of these she was now engaged in unabashed mimicry. Louie, who had got her cup of tea, heard a bell-like "*Os*-trich feathers!" and she was about to put a question to the copper-haired girl when, with a mock reverence and an explosive "Your *Ma*-jesty!" the child swept backwards into her. She barely saved her cup of tea. The girl gave a quick turn; her Clum—" was changed to a "Sorry!" as she saw a new face, and Louie smiled.

"Your feet were all wrong," Louie said.

The blonde child turned eagerly again.

"Can you do it?" she asked.

The next moment, before Louie could get out "A drawing-room curtsy? Yes," the child had cried: "Girls! Girls! Here's somebody who knows how to do it! Do come and show us!"

"Really?" said Louie, smiling, and handing her cup of tea to the copper-haired girl.

"Yes—come here, Rhoda, and watch (that's my sister—she's to be presented, you know)."

Louie laughed. "Quickly then—I have to see Miss Chesson——"

And, pushed unceremoniously forward, and still in her feathered hat and navy blue costume, Louie made her first bow to her fellow-students at Chesson's in the deep and swanlike genuflexion she had practised with her cousin, Cynthia Scarisbrick, a couple of years before. Then she ran out, smiling. 30

"*How* ripping!" she heard somebody say as she did so. "I expect she's been presented."

Louie sought Miss Harriet.

The Principal, a businesslike, damson-complexioned woman of forty-five, with a deerstalker hat on her close-cropped curly hair, asked her what course of study she proposed to take. Louie replied (in other words) that all courses were the same to her. Miss Harriet had had that kind of student before. She asked a few further questions, and then put Louie down for the elementary course. She dismissed her with a marked syllabus and a copy of the Rules.

Louie read the Rules, nodded, as much as to say, "I thought so!" and then laughed. There was no need to ask who had drawn them up; she remembered the frigid way in which Chaff had been put

into his place that afternoon. There was a serenity about them that transcended the ordinary imperative mood. "*Students do not absent themselves from Morning Prayers or Divine Service without Permission.*" "*Students do not give Orders to the Gardeners or Domestics.*" "*Students do not pass beyond the Bounds of the College (Map appended).*" If on occasion students did all of these things, that did not detract from the *largior ether* in which the Rules were conceived.

Nor did mere evidence to the contrary ever in the least degree abate Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's persuasion that the young ladies of Chesson's, being the daughters of gentlefolk, were by that very fact almost to be trusted to do without Rules at all. 31

On the following morning Louie, with leggings of doe-skin buttoned to her knees (see the second of the Captain's recommendations for the attire that suited her best), and wearing a wide-pocketed jacket not unlike a man's, began the practical study of Horticulture.

II

She was attached to the "posse" of six girls of which the copper-haired student, whose name was Richenda Earle, was the head. This girl, as the holder of the scholarship mentioned a page or two back, was the single non-fee-paying student in the place. Her father was a bookseller in Westbourne Grove, and she had kept his books for him before coming to Chesson's. She had picked up her knowledge of book-keeping at an obscure and ill-appointed Business School in Holborn, but, her health being anything but robust, she had taken up gardening under the impression that it was an out-of-doors pursuit. It was only this at Chesson's to a strictly limited extent. Whatever students did or did not learn, the output for the market had to be maintained, and this necessitated, for days and days together, work in the twelve long glass-houses, from the humid heat of which the girls came out limp and listless and relaxed. Richenda Earle suffered from these depressions more than most of them, and now only remained at the college because Miss Harriet had held out hopes for her of a place on the staff. She was easily head of all the classes of which she was a member, but was hopelessly incapable of making her personality felt. Add to all this that she was avid of popularity, and that her self-consciousness took the form of making her more assertive (without being a bit more effective) than any girl in the college, and 32 you will see why Louie felt a little sorry for her without taking to her very much. She for her part had fastened herself on Louie from the start, and had been the first to put the question that Louie had had to answer a dozen times before she had been at Chesson's two hours.

"No, I haven't been presented," Louie had said, finding herself waylaid almost at the door of Miss Harriet's room as she had come out again. "My cousin has; that's where I learned it. We practised it together."

"I've seen them go in," Richenda had murmured, a little wistfully, a little dully; "the carriages and things, you know. I live in London."

Thereupon she had volunteered some of the information stated above, as if inviting a confidence in return. "I'm glad you're in my posse," she had concluded, as Louie had turned away without giving any information whatever about herself.

The remaining members of "Earle's posse" were the two Burnett sisters ("B Major," the girl who was to be presented, and "B Minor," the sixteen-year-old beauty-to-be), a Scotch girl called Macfarlane, and one other girl, half French, Beatrice Pigou. There were four other posses at the college, and each was told off each day to put itself under the direction of one or other of the four gardeners, to pot, "prick out," water or whatever the task might be. The gardener at present in charge of Louie's posse was a sullen young Apollo called Priddy, whose face and neck and forearms ozone or the Gulf Stream had turned to the hue of some deep and old and mellow violin; and Burnett Minor and the younger girls, talking in terms of the life to which their eyes were yet 33 sealed, discussed Priddy with a freedom perfectly innocent and entirely appalling.

Louie had not been at Rainham Parva two days before she was wondering whether after all she wanted to stay. She didn't know really why she had come. Not one of the three commonest reasons for girls being there—a stepmother, to be able to earn a little pocket-money, or to get over a youthful love-affair—quite fitted her case. And then there were those ridiculous Rules. She supposed that if she stayed she would be on the same footing as the juniors, and she hardly thought she could submit to that. Not that the Rules did not seem to justify themselves; on the contrary, they did. Merely because Mrs. Lovenant-Smith affirmed that students did not do this or that, students as a matter of fact either did not do these things, or else consented to class themselves as transgressors when they did.

But Louie's own attitude in the face of a prohibited thing, inherited from her mother and now made inveterate by her upbringing, was invariably that of a wonder what would happen were the prohibition to be disregarded.

It was just a wonder, nothing more.

Then, on the night of her third day at Chesson's, she made up her mind to forfeit her fees and leave in the morning. The reason for her decision was this:

During the vacation certain digging had been allowed by the gardeners to fall into arrears; and Earle's posse, together with another set of six girls, had been set to do it. Now digging was the

hardest work the girls were ever called upon to do, and at the beginning of the term at any rate they were spared it as much as possible. But education or output required that this digging should be done, and accordingly the twelve girls had digged for the whole morning, and in the afternoon had varied the labour by carrying heavy pots from House No. 6 to House No. 10—a distance of perhaps sixty yards. The next morning twelve girls (or rather eleven, for Burnett Minor's unset muscles had suffered but little) were half incapacitated by stiffness, and that night there was an outcry for hot baths and arnica. Louie, clad in dressing-gown and slippers and carrying her soap and sponge and towel, hobbled to the bathrooms, and came, in the box-room, upon an indignation-meeting. 34

This box-room was the common meeting-ground for students who awaited their turns at the baths. It lay over the back courtyard arch, and the four bathrooms adjoined it, two on either side. It was piled almost to the ceiling with trunks and boxes and dress-baskets, the white initials of which glimmered in the shadows cast by a couple of candles on the floor; but there were isolated boxes enough to make seats for the seven or eight girls already assembled there. They had slippers on their naked feet and single garments on their aching bodies; and on one of Louie's own boxes Burnett Major was peering at the little blue flame of a spirit-kettle and mixing in a row of cups the paste for that beverage of revolt—cocoa. Burnett Minor had traitorously turned the general righteous anger to private account, had "bagged" the hottest bath, and was now carolling at the top of her lungs in the right-hand bathroom.

"——then if Earle won't do it I vote we draw lots!" Macfarlane was exclaiming shrilly as Louie opened the door. "Those lazy louts of gardeners are supposed to have all the digging done before we come up——" 35

They were not—not if Chesson knew it; but "Of course they are!" cried five voices at once.

"Well, I'm just not going to stand it—there——"

"And I'm not——"

"Nor me——"

"And for two pins I'd tell Priddy so!"

There was a moment's silence, but only because, all having spoken at once, all had to take breath at once.

"It's abominable——"

"Disgusting——"

"Celà m'embête——"

"Here's Causton—what do *you* vote, Causton?" they cried, turning to her.

"What about?" Louie asked.

"Why, everything, of course—this beastly place—and setting us to dig the first week—and Priddy's beastly cheek——"

Then every tongue was unloosed.

"*And* a row every time we want an extra blouse washed——"

"*And* washing two guineas a term extra——"

"*And* only the vuggles for dinner that aren't good enough for the market——" ("Vuggles" were vegetables.)

Another pause for breath.

"Let's what-d'-you-call-it—strike——"

Louie laughed as she sat stiffly down by Burnett Major.

"Oh, I'll vote for anything you like; I don't care," she said.

Then they began anew.

"Earle's head of the posse—*she* ought to do it——" 36

Richenda Earle's voice broke in in loud complaint.

"How *can* I? You know I would like a shot if it wasn't for my scholarship. But I should just be told that if I didn't like it I could go. Elwell's head of your lot. Elwell ought to go."

"I don't care who goes, but I will *not* be told to do things by Priddy."

"Priddy!——"

(Louie smiled again as there came from the bathroom the joyful voice:

"*Early one mo-o-orning—as the su-un was a-rising!*——")

"And those pots hadn't got to be moved—he was only making work——"

"—gros tyran!——"

"—like they kept us three weeks grading and packing tomatoes last autumn, and called it 'study'——"

"—and the bruised ones for us——"

"—not even fit for ketchup——"

"—Dothegirls Hall *this* establishment ought to be called!——"

Another momentary pause: then:

"—let's all sign a petition——"

"—no, a what-d'you-call-it—an ultimatum——"

"—just telling them straight——"

"Your bath, Earle——"

From the bathroom had come the gurgle of escaping water. Boiled pink, turbaned with her towel, smelling of somebody else's scented soap and radiating unrepentance that Earle's bath must be a tepid one, Burnett Minor bounced in.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, do lend me a dry towel, just to finish with. Oh, Causton, the curtsy, now that I've something loose on! Crocks! My cocoa, Major, and who said Priddy just now? 'Students do not fall in love with Priddy.' (I sha'n't hush.) Sugar, Mac, and, Causton, I wish you'd do my hair your way, just to see how it looks——" 37

And, twirling twice in the midst of a corolla of pink cashmere dressing-gown, she sank to the floor and began to nurse a chilblain on her heel.

Louie, her hands behind her head, leaned back and watched the scene with the greatest amusement. A master-rebel herself, she knew that here was no rebellion. The meeting, like other meetings, was merely letting off steam, and the girls who "wouldn't stand it" would be standing it exactly the same on the morrow. Well, on the morrow she herself would be off. Her boxes were only half unpacked; half-an-hour would put the other things back again. Already she saw that this Chesson's was an imposition. In the meantime, the indignation meeting was very amusing. She felt almost motherly towards these tractable revolutionaries. Her indulgence became still greater as they spoke out again.

"Another thing," a girl of Elwell's posse demanded; "why couldn't I go to Rainham yesterday to have my photograph taken?"

("Break the camera," Burnett Minor murmured to the chilblain.)

"And just because somebody'd bagged my boots and I was five minutes late the other day——"

"Je m'en fiche pas mal——" Pigou began.

("Parly Angly, voo affectay feele," from Burnett Minor.) 38

"I should like to see one of the gardeners at home looking at us the way Priddy does——"

"Or Miss Harriet either for that matter—she's only a sort of forewoman——"

"—applewoman——"

"—tomatoes——"

"—that's all she is really——"

"—nothing else——"

Louie laughed outright. Another gurgle had come from the bathroom, and Earle reappeared. Her announcement that the water was now cold added to the general sense of wrong.

"Not even enough hot water!"

"Scarcely a drop, ever!——"

"Odious!"

"Then will somebody come into my cubicle and rub me—not you, B Minor."

("Just give a squint out of the window, Elwell.")

("It's all right. Her lights are out. Lovey's too.")

"Well, I *won't* have a cold bath, to please Lovey or anybody else!"

Nor did Louie want one. She had risen. She moved to the window that looked out over the courtyard yew—the window from which watch was kept to see when Miss Harriet and Mrs. Lovenant-Smith retired—and yawned. In the middle of her yawn she suddenly laughed again.

"Good gracious!" she thought. It was too amusing.

Suddenly Richenda Earle, who also was standing by the window, spoke to her. Evidently Richenda did not think she had been fairly treated by the meeting.

"Do *you* think they ought to ask me to?" she complained. 39

Louie turned.

"To ask you to what?"

"To complain to Miss Harriet—me, the only Scholarship girl."

Louie shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "Oh, they won't complain to Miss Harriet!"

"No—but one doesn't like to refuse things——" Earle said in injured tones.

Before Louie would have had time to reply to this, had she thought of replying to it, a diversion occurred. Nobody had heard steps approaching, but all at once the door opened, and Authority, in the person, not of Miss Harriet, but of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith herself, stood looking in. The hubbub ceased as the boiling of a kettle ceases when cold water is poured in. Several of the conspirators rose to their feet; Burnett Minor, making no bones about it, bolted behind a box. Great is even the look of Authority; it was almost a superfluity when Mrs. Lovenant-Smith asked in measured tones from the doorway: "What is the meaning of this?"

Already the tails of two dressing-gowns had vanished out of the other door.

"What is the meaning of this?" Mrs. Lovenant-Smith asked again.

Then she looked round to see on whom to fasten her displeasure.

Louie saw her look, and instantly fathomed its purpose. She and Richenda Earle stood by the window, as it were the dramatic centre of some Rembrandtesque composition to which all else was merely contributory. The Scholarship girl was going to get into a row. She, Louie, had lived for years among rows; and was leaving anyway on the morrow. 40

Before the "Miss Earle" had passed Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's lips Louie had stepped forward.

"We've been waiting for our baths," she said.

Perhaps already Mrs. Lovenant-Smith would have preferred Richenda Earle to Louie; there is expediency even in Authority; but the challenge, if it was that, was a public one. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith turned to Louie.

"Do you know what time it is?" she asked freezingly.

It pleased Louie to take Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's question *au pied de la lettre*.

"I'm afraid my watch is in my cubicle. I could tell you in a moment," she said.

This the Lady-in-Charge saw fit to ignore. She drew her own watch from her belt.

"It is ten minutes past eleven," she said. "Students are not out of bed at ten minutes past eleven. Neither are candles burning. Miss Earle——"

But again Louie interposed. After all, it was rough on the Scholarship girl.

"Miss Earle came in only a moment ago to send us to bed," she affirmed, without a tremor.

"Then," said Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, turning to Louie, and perhaps feeling herself once more headed off, "you, Miss Causton, as a new student, are perhaps not yet familiar with the Rules. Be so good as to come to me at ten o'clock to-morrow morning and I will explain them to you."

Mrs. Lovenant-Smith did not make the discomfited rebels file out past her. She herself retired with dignity. Students do not linger in the box-room when it is made known that they are expected to go to bed at once.

But no sooner had the door closed on Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's back than the pent-up general breath escaped again in a fluttering exhalation. In it were awe, delight, homage. 41

"Oh, Causton!" somebody breathed. "You *are* a brick!"

"*Isn't* she?"

"Wasn't it stunning of her?"

"You'd have caught it, Earle!"

"I saw it in her eye!"

"But I say, Causton, you'll get a wigging!"

"She didn't speak to you, you know!"

"You cut in——"

Louie felt quite confused, so much did they make of so little.

"Good gracious," she said, "what are you all talking about? That's nothing, especially as I was

thinking of leaving in any case to-morrow."

There was consternation in the box-room. Had Rebellion found its leader only to lose her again immediately?

"Leaving!"

"Oh, I sha'n't leave till after ten o'clock now, you may be sure," Louie laughed.

"But—oh, I *say*!"

The dismayed voices dropped. There was a blank silence. It was only after half-a-minute that Burnett Minor, who had issued from cover again, begged: "Don't leave, Causton."

"Oh, I shouldn't leave because of anything like this," said Louie, enormously amused at the thought. "The place is a fraud—that's why I should leave."

"Oh, don't leave," another girl begged.

"Well, we'll see what she says to-morrow."

"She can't be *too* down on you——"

"Not the first time——" 42

Something that can only be described as a pleasant hardening came into Louie's grey eyes. Her laugh dropped a note. She looked at the adoring faces.

"That's just what I mean," she said. "If she *is*——"

"What?——"

"I'll stay."

And that also her stepfather would have described as "just like Louie."

III

Punctually at ten o'clock on the morrow Louie knocked at the door of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's office or drawing-room—it was both—and entered. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith was writing at an escritoire that was not big enough to accommodate her elbows, and so supported her braceleted wrists only. There was something contradictory about her attitude. Its rectitude as she sat at the inconvenient little desk suggested that she expected Louie, her turn, pause and inquiring "Well?" that she did not. Louie's observant eyes had already noticed a curious inconsistency about the Lady-in-Charge. A great number of things seemed to lie on the tip of her tongue, ready, apparently against her own better judgment, to be detached from it by a perfectly-timed fillip of opposition.

And Louie had only to remember the word or two with which she had dashed Chaff's affability to be fairly sure that though cocoa and candles in the box-room at eleven o'clock at night might seem a good enough reason for the present interview, as like as not another lay behind it. She stood just within the door.

"Well, Miss Causton?" 43

"I think you told me to come here at ten o'clock."

"Ah, yes. Please to wait a moment."

Louie listened to the squeaking of her quill and the faint jingling at her wrists as she continued to write.

When Mrs. Lovenant-Smith turned again it was almost as if she had thought better of something or other—say of an encounter with this long-chinned, grey-eyed girl who stood, not dressed for gardening, but in a long grey morning frock, looking at her from the door.

"I merely wished to impress on you, Miss Causton, that the Rules must be observed," she said. "I believe there is a copy of them on the smaller bureau by your right hand there. Take it and be so good as to study it. That is all I wished to say."

Louie did not believe the last sentence, but no disbelief showed in her eyes. She inclined her head, but watched Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, waiting for more. She thought that if she waited more would come. It did. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, having just dismissed Louie, rescinded the decision by speaking again.

"You are older than the others," she said, "and it ought not to be too much to expect of you that you will set a good example."

Louie, perhaps gratuitously, read a meaning into the words. Perhaps you guess what it was. Many of the older people of her world still remembered her mother's first marriage, and Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, though Louie did not like the look of her, was still undeniably of her world. With Louie herself the drawing-master theory of her paternity had long since gone by the board; the girl had not rested until she had discovered that her father was Buck Causton, pugilist and

artists' model, none other; and if Mrs. Lovenant-Smith had ever chanced to hear of her as Louise Chaffinger, and identified that person under the name which (whether from pride, spleen, sensitiveness or what not) she had since reassumed, there would probably be something very near the tip of her tongue indeed. And just as Buck had always been a pale fighter, so Louie's own mixed blood, though it might surge at her heart, left her cheeks untinged in moments of stress. She still stood, making no motion to go. 44

"I don't think I quite follow you," she said slowly. "Why do you say that something 'ought not to be too much to expect'?"

Mrs. Lovenant-Smith stiffened and drew in again.

"It is not necessary to follow me," she said. "You will find all that is necessary in the Rules. You may keep that copy; Rule 6 is the one I wish especially to call your attention to. Would you be so good as to pass me that bell as you go out—the small brass one on the cabinet there?"

She half turned to her writing again.

("Good gracious, what next!" thought Louie.)

The bell was a small Dutch figure in a metal farthingale, and Louie passed it. As she did so she glanced at the hand that took it. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's face was wrinkled like a dried apple, and the hand, though beautifully kept, was wrinkled too, and had, moreover, rather stumpy nails. Louie's own hands were exquisite. The bell passed from hand to hand.

Whether or not it was the glance at the hands, suddenly the word too much dropped from the tip of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's tongue. She put the bell down with a little clap.

"The Rules of the college are not called into question," she said. "So far they have proved quite sufficient for the kind of student the college was founded for. By the way, why are you not dressed for the gardens?" 45

("'Kind of student'—good—gracious!" Louie cried in astonishment to herself. "Very well, madam ——")

She spoke calmly, looking modestly down at her long cashmere skirt, but taking in her lovely hands (which toyed with the copy of the Rules) on the way.

"My dress?" she said. "Oh, I wasn't sure whether I should be staying or not."

Louie knew perfectly well that her leaving would make, at any rate until her cubicle should be filled again, a difference of something like sixty pounds a year, with extras, to Chesson's. That is rather a lot of money to hang upon a mere breach of Rule 6. Perhaps Mrs. Lovenant-Smith betrayed herself in the quickness with which she took her up.

"Do you mean you're thinking of leaving?" she asked.

Louie, who had lifted her eyes for a moment, dropped them demurely again.

"I mean," she replied, "that I didn't know whether *you* were going to dismiss *me* or not. You see, you may not want my—kind of student. I'd rather not be in any way considered as an exception," she added.

Had Mrs. Lovenant-Smith known Louie better she would have known that she had now no intention whatever of leaving. As it was, there probably came into her head the thought that after all Louie was a Scarisbrick and a niece of Lord Moone. Ladies-in-charge of horticultural colleges do not fall foul of the Honourable Emily and Lord Moone. All at once her severity relaxed—but she hated Louie thenceforward that it must be so. She smiled a little, but the smile had a twitch in it. 46

"I don't think we need go quite to that extreme, Miss Causton," she said. "All the same, I'm afraid the Rules are necessary."

"I dare say," said Louie.

"And so long as that is understood, that is the chief thing. In regard to candles in particular, in an old place like this there is always the danger of fire. In fact, I'm not at all sure that a fire drill ought not to be instituted. May I add that I quite appreciated the chivalrous way in which you tried to shield Miss Earle last night? Indeed, I wanted to say that quite as much as the other. I think that is all. Good-morning, Miss Causton."

"Good-morning," said Louie, stalking out.

As she crossed the Restoration hall, "'Kind of student'—good gracious!" she exclaimed again. "To talk to me as if I were Burnett Minor! 'Kind of student!'—I wonder it doesn't occur to her that somebody might have told me all about Miss Hastings and that gardener four years ago!—'Kind of student,' indeed!"

Still without changing her clothes, she walked out past the orchards, up the hill, and sat looking down over the coombes to the sea.

Leave Chesson's, now? Oh no, nothing was farther from her thoughts! She would stay, and why? Not because she had been treated as a junior, but because she had been taken, as it were, at her

own word. She herself might be perversely and nonchalantly cynical about her mixed birth, but she did not intend to allow anybody else—Mrs. Lovenant-Smith or anybody—to show as much as a flicker of consciousness of it. "Kind of student"!—Oh no, that amusement was going to be Louie's own private preserve. 47

For it had been her cynical amusement. Approximately, the mood took her once in five or six months, with or without occasion. Her mother knew its times and seasons, and its passings into abeyance, not into extinction. She did not call her sensitiveness morbid; quite on the contrary, she saw to it that it took the form of a pose of gaiety; she could be pitilessly gay with herself. Meek, harmless Cynthia Scarisbrick, for example, could have told tales about her gaiety when, not knowing whether she herself was eligible for presentation or not (but gathering from the tense silence on the subject that had reigned at Trant that she was not, or at any rate that her mother did not wish it), she had practised the ceremonial curtsy with her cousin. It had been Cynthia, not Louie, who had shed the tears.

But to be agreed with by Mrs. Lovenant-Smith that her origin was open to question (for the Lady-in-Charge had all but said that)—oh no, that was really too much!——

Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, who took a seedsman's salary!

She might have known that Mrs. Lovenant-Smith would know all, all about her——

Then, as she sat, she began to wonder where she had heard the name of Lovenant-Smith before. She had wondered it when first she had received her prospectus at Trant. Of course her stepfather knew these other Lovenant-Smiths, the adjutant's lot, and had probably spoken of them, but she did not think it was that. For a minute or two she sought in her memory....

She was ceasing to think when the recollection came of itself. It was only a trifling one after all. One of the boys with whom she had romped at Mallard Bois—Roy she had called him then—had been, she now remembered, a Lovenant-Smith. He would be a connection of the adjutant's. Of course, she had heard the name at Mallard Bois.... 48

Then Louie bit her lip. If there had been any doubt at all that Mrs. Lovenant-Smith knew the story of Buck there was none now. The association with Mallard Bois was quite enough....

Louie was glad she had looked insolently at those stumpy hands....

Beast!

The trees below her tossed restlessly, and far out the grey sea was whitecapped as if it had been rasped with a file. No boat had put out for the pollock-fishing or to lift a spiller that morning; only a pilot, a couple of miles out in the Channel, slowly lifted her nose for a moment and then hid it again. Louie felt a little cold, and rose. She made an attractive picture as she did so. Her brown hair was tossed by the wind, and her long grey skirt cracked behind her and clipped her limbs almost as if she had worn the garments of a man.

"Beast!" she muttered again.

Then she thought of another beast—this father of hers whose name she had not needed to take but had taken out of rancour against her mother and despite against herself. (But not for Mrs. Lovenant-Smith to turn up her nose at!) He now (she had this from Chaff) kept a public-house somewhere up the Thames—Lord Moone's cast-off brother-in-law in a public-house!—and any fitful romantic light that might ever have shone about him was now extinguished. Of course the Captain had uttered his usual wistful formula: "Not a bad fellow at all, I should have said"; but that was rather a criticism on the Captain than on Buck. Yes. Buck was simply another beast. But 49
though he were a potman, Mrs. Lovenant-Smith should give him every bit as much deference as if he had been a brewing peer....

"And I don't care—if it *is* the pride of the cobbler's dog, I'm going to keep his name," Louie muttered.

Suddenly she turned and climbed the stile that led back to Chesson's land. As she did so she realised that she had been out of bounds. She laughed curtly. Rule 3! Much she cared for their Rules! What about the Rule: "Miss Hastings does not elope with What's-his-Name the gardener"? —but that would keep. In the meantime she would change into her gardening clothes before lunch. She had shown Mrs. Lovenant-Smith that she had garments of freedom. The next time Louie threatened to leave she might be able to add to the force of the threat that she would take half-a-dozen girls with her.

Well, lunch was in half-an-hour; she had just time to change.

But as she descended through the orchards again she came upon Richenda Earle. The copper-haired girl was washing an espaliered plum-tree, and as she turned her head Louie saw that she had been crying. She asked Louie if she was going.

"Leaving here, do you mean? No. What's the matter?"

The girl turned her eyes away.

"Thanks awfully for last night," she grunted. "It was ripping of you. But you see it hasn't made much difference."

"How, not made much difference?"

Richenda glanced at the tree, and from the tree to the syringe in her hand and the pail of disinfectant at her feet. "This," she said. "Anybody can do this job, and I've been sorting out pots over there all the morning," she indicated the yard behind the trees where the flower-pots and debris were kept. "And *I* can't threaten to leave." 50

"Your scholarship, of course?"

"Yes. And I'm supposed to be working for the medal."

Chesson's wanted a Horticultural Society's medal badly. They had never had one, nor were likely to get one unless Richenda Earle got it for them. Louie, who was quickly fathoming the real economy of the place, looked again at Richenda's red eyes.

"Well, they won't send you away till you've failed," she said.

But Earle made an impatient gesture, and her eyes began to stream again.

"Oh, what's a girl like you know about it!" she broke out. "Yes, I know they'll keep me till then, but you don't know anything at all about it! You would if you'd had my upbringing! You don't know what the struggle is. You think digging and carrying pots is hard work; you wouldn't if you'd seen what I've seen! When you go to London it's just shopping and theatres and suppers and things; but just you try to keep a small bookseller's accounts for him, when they're hardly worth keeping, I mean, and collecting his debts when all his money's tied up in stock and your father's nearly bankrupt—not that he's ever solvent—you'd know what I meant then!"

Then the unexpected outbreak stopped suddenly.

Louie stood silently staring. She disliked seeing anybody cry. Richenda's words had little meaning for her; she supposed they contained a hidden meaning somewhere. Then the copper-haired girl went on, more quietly but no less bitterly: 51

"I should get a hundred pounds a year on the staff here," she said, "that is, if they won't waste me half-days just out of spite, like they're doing this morning. That's nothing to you. You others are here just for pocket-money, but we live on your pocket-money. I suppose I oughtn't to have come here at all. Not among all you. But I begged father to let me. Father once apologised to me—that was when there was a distraint out against him, if you know what that is—because he wasn't rich. Fathers ought all to be rich, he said. There are seven of us girls at home, and only one married. Oh, I tell you, you don't know!"

Louie wondered why she preferred Richenda Earle loud and striving for the popularity she never got to Richenda Earle unburdening herself thus. She herself went brightly masked, and disliked to see another's mind naked. Richenda's mind was stripped now. It was distasteful. Somehow or other Richenda contrived to miss both the balm of popularity and the solace of private sympathy.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry," Louie said awkwardly and a little stiffly.

At the tone Richenda drew in instantly.

"It doesn't matter," she said, compressing her lips and beginning to straighten her hair. "I shall just have to buck up, that's all. But girls of your class don't know anything about it, so you needn't think you do. There's the first gong. Come on."

As they passed the dairies a rabble of students raced past the end of the house on their way to the boot-lockers. Louie and Richenda entered by the side door. Richenda plunged at once into the scramble for house-slippers, but Louie, not having put on her garden boots that day, did not need to change. It was too late now to put on another dress. She waited by the inner door. 52

Suddenly she was spied by Burnett Minor. The child rushed towards her, a book in her hand.

"Are you going, Causton?" she shouted.

There was a loud "Ssssh!" They could be heard from the dining-room. The girls flocked round Louie, and hoarse, excited whispers broke out:

"Are you going?"

"She's dressed!"

"Are you going?"

"Did you see her?"

"Does Causton say she's going?"

"Ssssh—not all at once!——"

"No, I'm not going," said Louie.

Mouths gaped their very widest to make up for the inaudibility of the cheers.

"Hooray!"

"Is she going?"

"No, she's not going—hooray!"

Burnett Minor threw her book joyfully into the book-locker. Ordinarily her reading varied between an adoration of Tennyson and mocking and dramatic declamations either from the "Pansy Library," or from its brother-classics, of which the typical burlesque is "The Blood-stained Putty-knife, or The Plumber's Revenge." But this book was her album.

"I saw you come down dressed, and I did want you to put something in it if you were going," she whispered gleefully; "but you're not going! Hoo——"

Her voiceless mouth gaped wider than them all. 53

That midday Louie walked demurely up to Mrs. Lovenant-Smith at the head of the table and apologised for not yet having changed. From her tone Mrs. Lovenant-Smith may or may not have inferred that she had spent the hours since their interview in contrite meditation. She inclined her head graciously. But Louie, taking her place for grace between Burnett Minor and Richenda Earle, was murmuring to herself once more:

"'Class of student,' indeed!... Good gracious me!..."

IV

Louie quickly became the most popular girl in the college.

Her studies she pursued very much as who should say: "I am Louie Causton—take it or leave it." Neither Miss Harriet nor the gardeners could ever tell when she was interested in a lesson; if she learned, she concealed her processes. Before April was out—(the intervening time may be slipped over; the daily work in the gardens and houses went on as usual, the usual number of crates and parcels was despatched from Rainham Magna station, and already the girls were looking forward to June, which was always a slack month)—before April was out she could "slip" and "bud" as deftly as any when she chose; but few made more mistakes than she, and none accepted correction with her remarkable nonchalance. Afternoon "theory" she had begun to cut almost entirely. A slate hung in the hall, on which students were supposed to write down where they might be found when they left the immediate precincts of the college. One day towards the end of April there appeared on this slate: "Gone to Rainham; L. Causton." Then she awaited events with 54
Mrs. Lovenant-Smith.

There were no events.

She sent to Trant for a bicycle.

Truth to tell, as the spring advanced she needed the air. The glass-houses, with their smell of musk and mould and heated pipes and cherry-pie all mingled, oppressed her; the long forcing-house, where for the time being most of the work for the markets went on, completely took the starch out of her. She felt as if she was being forced herself. She hated the sight of the twelve houses; they merely meant so much ventilation, so much shutting-down for the evenings, so much watering, so much lassitude for the girls, so much money in Chesson's pocket. She was glad she had sent for the bicycle. Somebody else might read thermometers and close down and sprinkle floors and ply the hissing hoses. Louie wanted air.

Yet even the outer air was not sharp enough. It is not an invigorating air in which the lemon-verbena grows in trees up the cottage walls and scented geranium flourishes out-of-doors like a common hedge plant. In the sunken lanes through which she idled on her bicycle the primroses, twice as big as she had ever seen them, and the cowslips, great sub-tropical clusters, were already past; and she expected to see the roses out presently, big as sunflowers. There was something almost rank in the sweet bursting out of the land. She thanked goodness that a daisy was a daisy still, modest and unmagnified. She was not used to hedges of fuchsia. Nature might have been a little more sparing of her myrtle too. Louie always dropped from her bicycle when, coming out of one of the canals of still and scented air, she saw, across a burnt heath-patch or a clump of hardy gorse, a glimpse of the sea. For the sake of a look at the sea she often walked up 55
the hill behind Chesson's and sat on the stile she had crossed on the morning after her interview with Mrs. Lovenant-Smith.

Except by her example, however, she incited nobody else to break the Rules.

It was curious that she should know herself to be popular, and yet at the same time should also be secretly aware that she was a little out of things. All went well enough for the present, but only for the present. She knew quite well what would happen did she, a year or two hence, chance to meet any of her present fellow-pupils. She would not, then, be older than they in quite the same sense that she was now. They would meet; there would be eager recollections of the old days at Chesson's; oh, for that matter she could make it all up now!... "Come where we can have a really good talk! Where's Burnett Major now, and her sister? And have you heard from Elwell lately? And I wonder what's become of that red-haired girl—what was her name—Earle—yes, Earle? And of course you know Macfarlane's going to be married.... Now tell me all about what you're doing!"... Oh yes, Louie could make all this up—the bursts, the pauses, the dead stops, and then the falsely bright, perfunctory talk about Chesson's again. For she and her fellow-students would not be doing the same things. They would have taken recognised places, and Louie was not

sure that she herself had a place to take. Her father and mother had seen to that. She remained a spectator. If she was liked now, it was not because she went one inch out of her way to be so. She was just as ready to go out of her way to be disliked if she must go out of it at all. 56

In the meantime, however, here she was at Chesson's, to all intents and purposes her own mistress, and made so much of that she had Mrs. Lovenant-Smith largely at her mercy—for, had she been requested to leave, the two Burnetts, Elwell and others would now have left with her. So, doing exactly as she liked, and adored on every hand, Louie even wondered sometimes whether she had not been wrong in supposing that restlessness and discontent were bred in the very bones of her.

She was at the very top of her popularity about the time Burnett Major gave the birthday "cocoa" in her cubicle. (That is to say, Burnett Major gave the nucleus of the "cocoa"; the rest of the party happened by a natural process of accretion.) This time the junketing was held by Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's permission; it had been acceded readily. "Lovey's not such a bad old sort when you get used to her," B. Major said. It was in mid-May, on a hot evening, and, though Burnett's window was flung wide open, showing the dark yew outside, not a breath stirred, and the flames of the candles were four inches long in the air. Besides cocoa, Burnett had provided cake and biscuits and candied fruits and an enormous box of "assorted" chocolates; and Burnett's bed was like to break down with the weight of girls upon it.

Louie had had Burnett Major especially in her mind when she had painted her fancy picture of a possible meeting with her fellow-students a year or two hence. The two sisters were the daughters of a Gloucestershire M.F.H., and Louie could forgive B. Major for being a little dazzled by her approaching presentation. There was nothing unfamiliar to Louie, either, in the rest of the things she felt herself, at one and the same time, both "in at" and "out of," for probably Mewley 57
Hall, the Burnetts' home, was not very different from Trant or Mallard Bois. But Burnett Major's position a few years hence was a forgone conclusion; she filled it already in anticipation; and the noisy talk that was in progress as Louie joined the party threw bright lights on it.

They were discussing the coming vacations. These were Chesson's yearly dread. They interrupted his supply of free labour, and there were always fewest girls when he most wanted them. As the vacation arrangements rested after all chiefly with the parents, he could do little except express his preference that as many of the girls as possible should take their holidays in the empty month of June, and his hope that those who did not do so would defer them until as late as they could. Otherwise he was, to that extent, no better off than his trade competitors.

"Here she comes," Burnett Minor was crying as Louie entered the crowded cubicle. "I want to be here when Causton is. It's all right for Major—oh, you needn't think we don't know, Major—if you aren't actually engaged he's always about the place when you're at home—and I'm going to stalk you both with a camera and then what-d'you-call-it—blackmail him——"

"Shut up, Minor, or I shall send you out," B. Major ordered.

"Then I shall tell everybody who he is and shout his name through the keyhole. It's——" She moved her lips, threatening to pronounce the name there and then.

"Sneak!" said her sister.

B. Minor bridled. 58

"I *will* tell them if you call me that again! Causton, have you a young man? (That means, Avez-voo un jeune homme, Pig?)"

"Not for you to shout his name through keyholes," Louie replied, smiling.

"No, but do tell us—have you?"

"At my age?" said Louie mockingly, sitting down on the edge of the bed and reaching for candied fruits.

"Go on—you're trying to wriggle out of it—*have* you?"

"Hush, little girl—open your mouth——" She popped a fruit into the mouth that itself resembled an untouched fruit.

Pigou, from the lower deck of the washstand, interposed loudly:

"Elle a vingt-quatr'ans—elle est perdue!"

"Uppé petite chose, avec voter Françay," commented Burnett Minor.

"Cau-ston coiffe déjà Sainte Catherine," said the ruthless Pigou: "à vingt-quatr'ans on est déjà—pff!"

"Non elle isn't pff—rude chose! But she'll tell me when we sleep out, because I'm going to have my mattress next to hers, sha'n't I, Causton?"

"Mais elle vient d'promettre——"

"—and we shall talk about all those things you always say 'Hush' when I come in—sha'n't we, Causton?"

"Prrridd-ee!" taunted the French child: and B. Major spoke.

"But I say, Causton, when do you take your vac.—June or September?"

"And where shall you go?" somebody else demanded.

"I'm going to Ireland—father's taken a house," cried a third. 59

"Nobody cares where you're going! Causton, will you come home with us?"

"No; come to Ireland with us!"

"Well, can I come home with you? I loved that man who brought you here!" (Burnett Minor was the young woman who had loved Chaff.)

"It wasn't Lord Moone, was it?" Macfarlane asked.

"Or was it your father?"

"Your cocoa, Causton," said B. Major.

Louie had never been so run after before. She curled up among the slippered feet at the foot of the bed (there were four girls stretched upon it), and alternately stroked the hair and tweaked the ears of Burnett Minor, who had defeated Pigou in the scramble to put her head into Louie's lap. "I *can* have the pitch next to yours, can't I?" the child demanded, her eyes turned up and her face (to Louie) upside down. "There, you see, Pig, she says I can—so voo juste pouvez sechey-up, là."

This sleeping out was a summer custom at Chesson's. It began with the warm weather, sometimes in June, sometimes in July. On account of the morning and evening carrying of bedding and mattresses, the "pitches" nearest the house were deemed the most desirable, and weeks ahead there was bickering about the "bagging" of them. They bickered now, and then turned to the vacations again.

Louie listened, saying little. For her, vacations in this sense hardly existed. Vacations lose their value when you study as slackly as Louie did. It might be amusing to go home with one or other of the girls for a week or two, but on the other hand she hardly thought she would. These were the things she was both "in at" and "out of." B. Major was talking about them now. Soon she would be taking her presentation lessons; she was coming out; she had an unofficial admirer; yes, 60
Louie saw quite plainly what B. Major's future would be. What was her own going to be? She had not the least idea.... No, she did not really want a vacation. More or fewer, there would be girls at Chesson's throughout the summer. Chesson's still amused her; she could leave once for all when it ceased to amuse her. She was learning nothing. She neither wished to start a lavender farm, as Elwell, the daughter of Sir James Elwell of the Treasury, did, nor to grow peaches, as did Macfarlane, nor to add to her pocket-money by selling pot-pourri at extravagant prices to her friends, which was Burnett Major's idea—until she should marry. She could hardly sell pot-pourri to her prize-fighting father. She might (she smiled) sell him hops—she seemed to remember that beer was made of hops....

And she certainly did not intend to mug at theory for the sake of a medal, as Earle was doing at this very moment....

The party was still discussing this life which was hers and yet not hers when Miss Harriet, going her rounds, tapped at the door and entered.

"Bedtime, young ladies, please," she said. "Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's compliments, and she hopes you have enjoyed yourselves."

Her tone was that of one who might say: "You see, young ladies, what liberty you have *within* the Rules; isn't it much pleasanter all round?"

The party broke up.

The weeks passed. In June a number of the girls went home, Earle among them. Permission to sleep out was given, a little earlier than usual on account of the heavy mildness of the nights; and 61
Louie lay in the orchard, between Burnett Minor and little Pigou. The convolvulus came out, great white trumpets in the hedges; the sea over the hill became of a milky blue; and there floated out to it dense tracts of odours, lilies, and syringa, jasmine and roses and hay. You wearied of the smell of meadow-sweet; in the houses you could hardly take breath. The sun was reflected piercingly from their glass roofs, and the girls spent the afternoons in deck-chairs under the shadow of the courtyard yew.

The thing that (Louie sometimes told herself afterwards) made all the difference and yet (as she also sometimes told herself) made no difference at all, began very trivially. It was just such another accident as that which, nine or ten years before, had sent her to her mother with a demand to be told "who the Honourable Mrs. Causton was."

Ordinarily, the girls at Chesson's were a little careless about the dressing of their hair. You cannot move constantly among banks of plants, and pick fruit, and net cherry-trees, and be for ever stooping over beds and frames, and keep your hair fit to be seen. Therefore, once a month or so, the girls might, if they wished, go in parties of four or five to a hairdresser's at Rainham,

there to be professionally—whatever the word may be. These parties were made up more with a view to the enjoyment of the half-holiday than to the business strictly in hand; and Louie, had she cared, might have been a member of each detachment that went. On this particular day Louie had had much ado to free herself from Burnett Minor's affectionate clutch.

"Oh, do come with our lot, Causton!" B. Minor had begged. "Oh, you are rotten! You know you 62
went with Elwell before, and with Major before that, and I do want mine properly done like yours, not just punched up the way we do it!"

"What, like Saint Catherine?" Louie laughed.

"Do come."

But Louie had shaken her off.

"He'll remember how mine's done; I was there a week ago. No, I won't come. I'm going to do some theory this afternoon."

"Oh, what a fib! You never do theory!"

"Well, I ought to. No, I won't come."

"Then will you lend me your bicycle?"

"Yes, if you like; but the others are walking, aren't they?"

"Well, I'll wobble with them."

And Louie had watched the party set out, Burnett Minor on the bicycle, "wobbling" and leaving behind her a complicated track in the dust of the drive.

She did not know why she had said she would do theory that afternoon. She supposed it was because she felt slack and bored. Nor did she do very much theory. She went into the classroom, languidly turned over the pages of an old "Balfour," wondered what it mattered to anybody at Chesson's (except perhaps to Earle) that "movements had been observed in the pollen-grains of Cereus Speciosissimus," or that "changes took place in the stamens by suppression and degenerations of various kinds." Then she glanced at a preparation on the stage of the microscope opposite Richenda Earle's empty chair, and yawned. She looked out into the courtyard. Three or four girls dozed in deck-chairs under the dark yew. There was an empty chair 63
—but no; a clatter of washing up was going on in the kitchen under the box-room; she would go up to her cubicle.

She did so, and, pushing off her slippers, lay down on her bed.

Her window was open as far as it would go, but the yew seemed to shut out even what little air there was. All that entered was the faint acrid smell of consuming rubbish; they were slow-burning somewhere at the back. The sounds of the washing up were fainter now; a pigeon alighted on her sill. She had been an idiot, she told herself, to fag herself that morning listening to Hall's demonstration in the forcing-house. She wished there was a pond about the place, with a boat or a punt. She would have bagged the boat to sleep in. It would be jolly to be rocked to sleep in a boat or a punt.

She closed her eyes. The last thing she saw before she did so was the little black-framed miniature of the fourth Lord Moone, the last but three, in his tied wig and ensign's uniform. Louie had tacked it up by her mirror merely because it had been in her room at Trant as long as she could remember and, if one might judge from the youthful face, he was less of an opinionated fool than the other Moones—much less so than Uncle Augustus....

She turned over. Then she slept.

Sleep also was deep, too deep, at Rainham Parva. It weighed on the girl like a mulch. At five o'clock Louie could hardly drag herself out of it. She fumbled at her loosened belt and pulled out her watch. Five! The tea-gong must have gone.

Well, perhaps tea would rouse her.

She felt by the side of the bed for her slippers, rose, touched her hair as she passed the glass, 64
and went drowsily downstairs.

As Mrs. Lovenant-Smith and Miss Harriet always took tea in their own or one another's rooms—which, for that matter, the students also were permitted to do if they chose—the meal was a noisier one than either lunch or supper. Louie heard one of Burnett Minor's several voices as she pushed at the door. The child saw Louie's face in the opening and sprang up.

"Here she is—give it to me—I'm going to read it myself——" she cried.

Burnett Minor always wanted to read it herself—"it" usually being one of the sublimer passages from the current number of the "Pansy Library" or an especially choice one from an office-boys' periodical. Louie smiled languidly now as the girl snatched a booklet from Elwell's hand and gave tongue.

"I've punctured your back tyre, Causton, but Mac has some solution and we'll mend it after tea—and I'm always to do my hair like this, Harris says—do look at it, isn't it stunning?—and now—

aha!" (somebody had made a grab for her book). "Thought you'd got it, didn't you, Elwell? Now I'll read it first and then show her the picture, and that reminds me, Mac, you've never given me my 'Jack Sheppard' back that I lent you——"

Louie reached for a chair. She yawned again.

"Do give me a cup of tea, somebody. I hope the watering's all done, for I'm not going to do any. What's the child got now? If it's 'Maria Martin' or 'Irene Iddesleigh,' I think I know them by heart."

The child herself answered her question. She jumped on a chair and extended an arm for silence. 65

"Ready?" she cried. "Now!"

"'THE LIFE AND BATTLES OF BUCK CAUSTON,'"

she declaimed in her most ringing voice,

> "'*Being the Full Story and Only Authorised Life of this Famous Pugilist*'—

("Causton's uncle, don't forget, girls)—

> "'*Revised by Himself and now Published for the First Time—including his Historic Encounter with the Great Piker Betteridge*'—

("Piker Betteridge—'Piker'—isn't it lovely?)

> "'*Entered at Stationers' Hall and All Rights Reserved*
> "'PRICE ONE PENNY'"

B. Minor drew out every syllable of the linked sweetness, and concluded;

"And lo and behold—on the cover—Buck himself—Uncle Buck, Causton—you needn't say he isn't—as large as life and twice as beautiful—there!"

She held up the booklet in triumph.

But she drew it back again, bubbling with enjoyment. "Wait till I find *the* gem—the one about Piker," she cried.

Her fingers fluttered rapidly through the precious pennyworth in search of the "gem."

Louie's cup of tea had been at her lips, but not a drop spilt as she put it down again. If her colour changed at all it was only as that other pale fighter's had done whose story, Price One Penny, the 66
unconscious Burnett Minor was rapturously searching.

"Here it is!" cried B. Minor, peremptorily extending her hand again. "Listen, everybody!—

> "'*But the redoubtable Buck refused to allow the wiper to be skied. He recked nothing of his bunged optic and the claret that flowed from his beezer. Game as a buck-ant he advanced for the twenty-eighth round. The Piker, whose bellows were touched——*'"

But Louie had risen and walked to the child. She held out her hand.

"Let me look," she said.

B. Minor gave her a suspicious look, as if she feared she might be reft of her treasure. "You will give it me back?"

"Oh yes."

Louie took the book.

She supposed she was awake now, but somehow a curious air of unreality enveiled whatever it was that was happening. She looked at the cover of the "Life" in her hand. The most execrable of woodcuts could hardly disguise what she saw. Traditionally posed, nude above the waist, and clad below only in tights and fighting-shoes—formidably watchful, lightly poised for the blow—in appearance at any rate he was a man and superb. But really he had been cruel, faithless, divorced.

As if she had passed merely from one state of half-wakefulness to another, she did not think of the bomb she was about to drop among the girls. She only wanted to look, and to look, and to look again at this man, who was her father. 67

"Isn't it just Causton's mouth and chin?" she barely heard Burnett Minor bubbling. "But I can't say she has Uncle Buck's beezer——"

Slowly Louie handed the "Life and Battles" back. At any rate she had now seen him, if only in a wretched woodcut. She looked quietly about her.

"That's my father," she said, perhaps a shade distinctly and loudly.

Then she looked about her again.

Burnett Minor jumped down from her chair. Her eyes shone flattery on Louie. The very audacity of such a lie compelled her admiration.

"O-o-oh—*what* a whopper!" she cried. Louie turned her eyes to Burnett Minor.

"You said uncle. You weren't quite right. That's my father," she said again.

Burnett Minor's life was full of miracles. A miracle more or less made no difference. Her eyes sparkled. She alone of the girls believed.

"Not really?" she gasped.

Louie nodded.

"Qu'est c'qu'elle dit?" Pigou cried excitedly, somewhere at the back.

"Pooh, she didn't—she only nodded—nodding isn't a lie," a casuist scoffed.

"Stupid, don't you see she's joking?"

But Burnett Minor was watching Louie—only to be quite sure.

"Honour?" she cried. "Spit your death?"

"Honour."

"How splen-*diferous*! And you never told us!"

But Burnett Major had already looked at her sister. She was shocked into using her Christian name. "*Genista!*" she reproved her. 68

"Let me look again," said Louie.

She looked again at the man who had been cruel, faithless, divorced. Again she handed the "Life" back.

"He keeps a public-house up the river," she said.

At that the tension was suddenly relieved. That, of course, was too much. They breathed freely again. The derisive clamour broke out.

"Oh, don't you see? They've made it up between them—frauds!"

"Of course they have! Come and finish tea."

"She'll be saying that was the man who brought her down next!"

"Causton, I'll never, never believe another word you say!"

"Come on—the housekeeper will be here in a minute."

"Pig, you've stolen my piece of cake that I was saving!"

"Hurl the bread and butter, Mac."

And the crowd which had gathered about Louie dispersed to the tables again.

Not until ten minutes later, when she had gone up to her own room again, did Louie begin to wonder what had impelled her to make her surprising declaration. But in an instant her ten-years'-old habit of thought asserted itself again. Why have made it? Rather, why not have made it? She would have made it sooner had occasion offered. Elwell and the Burnetts did not drag their fathers in; she had not dragged her father in either. She had not told them that her mother was Lord Moone's sister—it was known, but she had not told them; why should she have paraded 69
the fact that her father was this redoubtable Buck, from whose beezer the claret had flowed as he had advanced for the twenty-eighth round? They could have known it any time they had wanted! Conceal it? Why, had she not all her life been glorying in that very pride of the cobbler's dog?

And still, deep down in her, she wondered whether it had been even that sort of pride, and not rather that secret hunger of the heart that, while she was "in at" everything, she was also "out of" everything. Had it been that that had caused her to say quietly: "That's my father"?

Or perhaps it was even something deeper still. Perhaps, in a word, it had been her blind groping towards that crude and strong and cruel and joyous life Richenda Earle had said she knew nothing about.

She wondered whether the girls downstairs were talking about her now.

Her eyes fell on the black-framed miniature of the fourth Lord Moone. Then, as if her brain had received a number of disordered impressions all heaped one on the top of the other, she sat down on the edge of her bed, not so much to think as to remember again exactly what had happened.

Gradually the disorder cleared. Phrases and the tones in which they had been uttered began to stand forth more distinctly. Presently she was able to allocate each to its speaker. It was her first attempt to estimate differences in the future her declaration might have made.

Burnett Minor, of course, she could dismiss summarily. To her it had been a high lark, that but endeared Louie to her the more. But Burnett Major? What about her? "*Genista!*" she had exclaimed, shocked at her young sister's apparent belief in the socially impossible. Yes, it would 70
be interesting to see what difference, if any, was to be seen in Burnett Major's attitude now. And

Elwell's "*Oh!*" What about that? And Macfarlane's blank look? And what did Richenda Earle think?

Louie did not know yet.

And what about Mrs. Lovenant-Smith? Undoubtedly Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, knowing about it herself, would have preferred Louie to keep silence.

The thought of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, however, always braced Louie. That curious pleased coldness came into her eyes again. She would see about Mrs. Lovenant-Smith by-and-by. In the meantime, the last thing she intended to do was to absent herself from them all. She would go down to supper.

She took a clean blouse from a drawer, laid it out on her bed, and then, reaching for a towel, started for the bathroom.

Before she reached the bathroom, however, one of her conjectures was already answered. Richenda Earle's cubicle was on the same corridor as hers, four doors lower down, and she met Richenda herself, who had come back from her vacation a week before, by the embrasure of one of the latticed courtyard windows. It was almost dark; in the recess the little reflectored oil lamp had been lighted, and it shone on the Scholarship girl's copper hair and angular shoulders. Louie stopped. She did so deliberately. Let Earle allude if she dared.

"You washed?" she said, on a rising note.

"No, not yet. I—I came up for a book," said Richenda.

"You're not studying to-night, are you?" 71

"Ye-es—oh yes, I must."

"Classification?"

"Ye-es—yes."

"How far have you got now?"

Louie's mood was on her. It was overdue, but it had come now, and she was challenging Earle. Nevertheless, she was ignorant of what she really challenged when she challenged Earle. Hard knowledge of the true weight of Life will tell, and Earle's knowledge of that weight told now. The girl's head was downhung, so that the nodule of bone at the back of her neck caught the light sharply. Suddenly she looked up.

"But you are Lord Moone's niece, aren't you?" she said, without preface.

Since her vacation, this daughter of a struggling Westbourne Grove bookseller had seemed less assertive than before, and was, somehow, none the worse for it. Louie didn't know what had made the difference, but she momentarily dropped her point.

"Yes," she said. "Why?"

"Then——?" Richenda halted.

"Then what? The other that I told them downstairs is just as true, if that's what you want to know."

"But—but——"

"Well, what?"

Earle evidently mitigated what she had been about to say.

"I only mean that—that you must have thought it queer, my talking as I did—that morning, you know?"

Louie saw the approach of the first attitude for her garner.

"What morning?" she demanded. 72

"When they punished me—when I was washing the fruit trees."

"I remember. Well, why should I think anything queer?"

Earle's head dropped again. Again the sharp nodule of bone showed.

"Do you mean," Louie said, "that if my father's what I said, no doubt I know as much about what you were saying as you do?"

"Oh no!" Earle said, the more quickly that that probably had been what she had meant.

"Then what do you mean?"

"Only that it's—so odd——"

But suddenly Louie gave her towel a twitch and turned away. She spoke with her chin over her shoulder.

"I don't love my mother," she said, "but for all that she is Lord Moone's sister—Augustus Evelyn Francis Scarisbrick, Lord Moone. And the other's my father. I wouldn't study too hard about it if I were you. You have your medal to get."

She walked abruptly to the bathroom.

That night, as usual, she sat at supper between Burnett Minor and Richenda Earle. The ordinarily irrepressible child on her left was silent; but others, two or three places removed from Louie, leaned back or forward from time to time to speak to her. She fancied Burnett Minor had been crying; she was sure of this when, giving the child's hand a pat under the table, she felt her own hand impulsively caught and squeezed. Then, in proportion as Burnett Minor cheered up (which she usually did very quickly), the others ceased to talk across to Louie. It was as if, whoever did it, some normal level of chatter must be maintained. Soon supper was as desultorily talkative as 73
it always was. Louie, glancing at the top table, saw that Mrs. Lovenant-Smith knew nothing of what had happened at tea-time. She was, however, quite ready for her the moment she should find out something.

V

One afternoon about three weeks later Louie Causton had occasion to go into the carpenter's shed. This shed lay between the dairies and the boiler-house that was the centre of the hot-water-pipe system, and Priddy had a frame making there. Half this frame, protected by a board with "Wet Paint" chalked upon it, leaned against the outside wall, and, with his back to the sunlit doorway, a young man, whom at first Louie took to be Priddy, was doing something at a bench. Hearing her, he turned. It was not Priddy. Louie did not know him.

There is in the British Museum a small helmeted head very like the young man Louie saw. It is on the upper floor, among the Tanagras, in a case on the left as you walk from the stairs. This young man, of course, was not helmeted. His face was handsome and slightly vacuous; his eyes in particular had something of the blankness of the little terra-cotta head; and his mouth was full and classically curved, and had the slightest of smudges of dark moustache along the deeply indented upper lip. A pair of rolling muscular shoulders showed through his white sweater; his old trousers were tucked into a pair of wooden-looking boots; and he was filing something. Louie wondered what business he had there.

He told her. He spoke in a slow voice, as if he had got his explanation by rote. He was there by 74
Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's permission, he said.

"We had a smash with the centre-board, you see," he explained. "Crash—just at tea-time. Izzard wanted to send it to Mazzicombe, but I told him they'd charge nearly as much as we gave for the beastly boat. So I'm doing it myself."

Then, as if his presence within the precincts of a horticultural college for young women was quite explained, he bent over his filing again. Louie, who had come for a couple of boards that had been put aside for her, took them and went out. She was twenty yards away when she heard the young man call slowly after her: "I say—I ought to carry those for you, you know——"

The boards were for her bed. This she had removed from the orchard. The new place lay quite beyond the orchard, at the foot of the hill between Chesson's and the sea. There, for the first time on the previous night, she had had the best of what breeze there was.

It had been the attitude of her fellow-students during the past month—or, more fairly, what she had conceived to be their attitude—that had caused her thus to remove herself.

It might be too much to say that she was still not as popular as ever. These things are not demonstrable. Popular she had been; now—well, it depended a little more than it had done. Burnett Minor, of course, would have eaten from the same plate with her by day and shared her bed at night had she been permitted—also had she not left for her vacation a fortnight before; but Burnett Major—Louie was not so sure about Burnett Major. Her attitude had been more than correct; it had been so correct that Louie had been put altogether in the wrong. The words, of 75
course, had never been said, but Louie had imagined Burnett Major's private opinion to be as follows:—

"But why didn't she tell us sooner? What earthly difference does she suppose it would have made? Who cares about things like that? I dare say her father's just as good as anybody else's father; for that matter, mother's grandfather was only a farmer—mother told us so herself; but nobody likes being treated as if they were snobs. It showed a lack of confidence, that's what it showed; and I don't know—now—I mean no girl, unless she *wasn't* quite a lady, would——" Louie could supply that part too.

"I don't care—I *love* Causton!" she had also imagined B. Minor as having sobbed, bold and unconvinced. "He didn't sky the wiper when his beezer was bleeding, anyway!"

Yes: for Burnett Major, presentation and all the rest of it lay ahead.

Matters would probably have stopped at that had Louie herself allowed them to do so; but that would not have been like Louie. Allow them to stop there? Good gracious, no! Her cynicism had become bright indeed. *She* was not the girl to contaminate the innocent Burnett Minor; neither—

for she was a Scarisbrick when all was said and done—was she going to be driven willy-nilly into the society of Richenda Earle as company good enough for her. She could look after herself, thank you. Coventry is no unpleasant place provided you have the putting of yourself there, and at any rate her Coventry at the foot of the hill was cooler at night than the other one. It meant carrying her mattress and bedding a little farther, but she had a prizefighter's physique to carry them with, which was more than her nearest neighbour, Elwell, the daughter of the Treasury mandarin, could say. 76

It is true that she did sometimes wonder (with Burnett Major, perhaps) whether she had not inherited also from the prizefighter something less desirable than his physique—a discontented and ill-conditioned nature. But that did not mend matters. It merely made her, if it did anything at all, distrustful of herself. And as this is the story of Louie, virtues and vices and all, her moods must go down with the rest.

At any rate, rolled in her blanket at the foot of the hill, she could feel the night wind on her face, and see the stars, and in her fancy deride or boast of her parentage to her heart's content.

On the afternoon following that on which she had fetched the boards from the carpenter's shed she went to the shed again, this time for a couple of tent-pegs and a piece of cord for the better securing of her blankets. The vacant young Tanagra was still there. But this time he was not quite so vacant. He had had leisure to think of quite a number of words.

"I say," he said, lifting slow and bashful eyes of the colour of blue porcelain to Louie, "I've been thinking. Haven't I seen you before?"

"Yes. Yesterday," said Louie shortly. He had had the bad luck to catch her at her brooding. But he did not seem to notice her curtness.

"No, but I mean—before——"

"When?"

"Isn't—isn't your name Chaffinger?" He almost blushed.

"No." 77

"Oh!"

Then she relented a little.

"I was called Chaffinger for a time. My name's Causton. I suppose yours is Chesson, or you'd hardly be here?"

"Chesson? Why Chesson? No. Mine's Lovenant-Smith—Roy Lovenant-Smith."

"Oh!" said Louie. "Then you're right. We have met before, at Mallard Bois."

Roy Lovenant-Smith appeared to be so relieved at being rid of a perplexity that he didn't much care if they never met again.

"I thought we had," he said mildly. "You were Louie Chaffinger then. I knew you were."

"But what," Louie asked, "are you doing here?"

He radiated simplicity.

"That centre-board, didn't I tell you? Izzard would make me go halves in the rotten old thing; just look at her; hardly a shroud on the port side, and the centre-board was hitched up with a piece of old rope instead of a chain and down it came the other tea-time. It's the cabin table as well as the centre-board, you see, and the whole thing shut up-just like that——"

He set the inner edges of his hands together and then closed his palms with a slap.

"All the tea—jam and all the lot," he said.

He amused Louie. "That was a pity," she said demurely.

"Wasn't it? But I say, I shall be catching it. I might use the shed, aunt said, but she told me it was a fixed Rule about men, unless you're a gardener, of course——" 78

("An obedient nephew," Louie thought.) "Then I must go at once," she added.

"Well, I shouldn't like to get you into a row too," said Roy Lovenant-Smith ingenuously.

"No," Louie agreed, more demurely still. "They have to be strict, you know."

"Rather!" said Roy Lovenant-Smith heartily.

And Louie left him.

She was hardly out of sight before her laughter broke forth. "'All the tea—jam and all the lot!'" she repeated softly, and laughed again. She scarcely remembered this delightful young man. When, as a child of eleven, she had played leapfrog, he could hardly have been more than seven, and she felt herself to be far more than four years his senior now. He was the adjutant's son, she supposed. Well, he would hardly need Chaff's usual extenuation about his being a bad fellow at

all: Louie would be very much surprised if he had wit enough to be very bad, or, for the matter of that, very anything else either. Once more she laughed. At any rate she had to thank him for dispelling her megrims for the time being. Still laughing softly, she passed through the orchards, ascended the hill, and sought her favourite place by the stile at the top.

She had not thought very much about young men. She had observed them as so many phenomena, obviously superior to the animals, yet not quite identifiable as beings with inner experiences akin to her own. They looked at her irregular mouth and elongated chin, said the things young men did say, and departed again, taking their various moustaches and their unvarying smell of tobacco to some girl of the kind she knew they accounted "pretty." They were quite different beings from the fairy prince of her childhood; and since her childhood's days she had grown gradually, she did not know how, to a fairly accurate estimate in retrospect of the "little party" to which Chaff had once taken her, pigtails and all. Her views of marriage too were coloured by that mixed parentage that made her, she supposed, not "common" and not "a lady." She would not marry unless this was clearly understood. What else there might be in marriage was shadowy, to be considered after this redoubtable magnanimity was safely out of the way. 79

With no young man had she ever had "a lark."

She was, however, more in the mood for a lark now—not necessarily with a young man—than she had ever been in her life before. "Cau-ston a vingt-quatr'ans—elle coiffe déjà Sainte Catherine," the remorseless Pigou had said: oh, had she? Did she? Moreover, you cannot put yourself gloomily into Coventry; others must be made to see that you consider your sequestration the most desirable of conditions. Indeed, she had said as much to Richenda Earle only the night before.

Richenda was the only one of the girls who slept indoors, and Louie, carrying her bed-trappings out from the house, had come upon Richenda by the little green door of the espaliered wall that led to the orchards. Richenda had made an advance, willing, apparently, to forget the snub Louie had administered after the "Life and Battles" revelation, and had offered to carry her pillow for her.

"Why do you go so far?" she had asked, as they had left the orchard behind.

"Oh, I hate being disturbed," Louie had replied. "I'd go right down to the shore if it wasn't for the climb up again." 80

"But suppose you wanted anything during the night?"

"What should I want?"

"Of course, I forgot. You don't have headaches. I have—frightful ones."

"Then why don't you come out too? There's quite a jolly place here. I'd help you to carry your things."

"Oh, I've got to read," Richenda had shaken her head.

"You'd be heaps better for it——"

Louie had not much in common with Richenda—save perhaps (she loved little cuts like this at herself) that both of their fathers were literary. But she had had that rather brutal snub on her conscience. That had come out next.

"You do study too hard," she had said, "and—I say, Earle—I'm sorry for what I said that night—you know—when I snapped at you and said you'd your medal to get. Will you forget that?"

The next moment she had almost wished she hadn't said it, Earle's hungry gratitude had shown so.

"It wasn't your fault a bit," the red-haired girl had broken out impulsively. "It was all mine. I ought to have minded my own business. But I was so—so——"

"Well, try sleeping up here," Louie had cut her short. "It's jolly."

But Richenda had gone on. "I was stupid," she had murmured.

"I don't know that you were. You see how it is."

"Oh, I was, I was——"

"Well, as I tell you, I don't think much of my mother's lot."

"Ah, *you* can say so," Richenda had replied, shaking her head. Then, as Louie had thrown down her mattress, "You don't mean to say you undress here?" she had asked. 81

"Well, I don't sleep in my clothes."

"But don't your things get wet?"

"I wrap 'em in my waterproof.... You won't come up, then, and run down to the shore for a bathe before breakfast?"

"Causton, they'll be dropping on you yet!" Earle had said, almost frightened.

"Well, without the bathe?"

"Oh, I should die!"

And Richenda had gone back to sleep where she might find remedies for her headaches within reach of her hand during the night.

Louie sat on the stile. The sea had a soft bloom, and the sky was of the colour of the whites of a baby's eyes. Bees hummed among the scabious, and blue and sulphur butterflies hovered over the patches of wild thyme. A tramp, sullying the air behind her, crept slowly up to Bristol; a single nodding grass-head near at hand shut her out almost completely. Mazzicombe, down under the hill, was hidden. Louie watched it all, thinking of nothing, or, if of anything, of how sweet it was to relax all her muscles to the point of not stumbling off the stile, and all her mind save that she might still be just conscious that she existed and was Louie Causton....

"Hallo," said a slow, imperturbable voice behind her; "here we are again."

She started a little. Roy Lovenant-Smith was returning with a baulk of old wood over his shoulder.

"Oh, it's you," she said. She did not know whether she was glad or annoyed to be interrupted.

"Yes, it's me," he replied placidly.

She was silent for a moment; then: "I thought you hadn't to hang about here?" she said.

"Well," he put it to her candidly, "how can I get over the stile when you're sitting on it? How can I, now?"

She laughed. "Well, I must get off on my proper side." She did so. "There," she said.

He climbed over with great deliberateness, walked a few yards with his piece of timber, and then turned again.

"No, you can't see her from here," he said. "She's down under the hill there. I don't think she's worth bothering about, but Izzard says she'll be quite all right with a new stay or two. I suppose I shall have to get 'em."

Louie felt a return of her amusement.

"Who's Izzard?" she asked.

"Izzard?" He looked at her as if she ought to know that. "Izzard's the other chap. Always painting, you know. Painting and mooning about and leaving me to do all the work. He's away there somewhere now." He pointed vaguely across the Channel. "I suppose he'll come back when he's ready. She *is* an old egg-box!—I say, how's your cousin Eric? And that girl—what's her name—Cynthia, wasn't it?"

She didn't know, and told him so; she did not tell him that she didn't care either. He cogitated for a moment, and then said:

"But I say—what do you *do* at this place? Seems funny to me.... Mind yourself—somebody wants to get over——"

She had not heard anybody approach. It was Priddy, going down to Mazzicombe. Louie stood aside from the stile. Priddy climbed over it and began to descend the hill. Lovenant-Smith looked at Louie in surprise.

"I say," he said, "that's cool! Don't those fellows take their hats off to you?"

"No," said Louie. Then she turned her clear grey eyes on him. She had been fairly caught.

"Don't they? By Jove!... What are you looking at me like that for?"

The rippling laugh with which Louie replied dropped a note. "Guess!" she said.

"How can I guess?" he asked, with his innocent and statue-like stare.

For answer, Louie glanced to where Priddy's brown bowler hat was disappearing over the edge of the hill. Roy Lovenant-Smith saw—he really saw——

"What?" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that that chap will——?"

She nodded. He stared.

"What, get you into a row for talking to me?"

"He may not."

"No, but really, joking apart?" he said incredulously.

"Perhaps he won't."

"Oh, come, I say!... Look here, shall I go back with you and explain?"

The innocent! "I don't think I would," said Louie, smothering her laughter.

"But—hang it all! I say, I *am* sorry!"

"Oh?"

"I mean sorry I've got you into a row, of course," he amended.

"Oh, I thought you meant sorry you stopped and talked to me."

"Of course not. That is, if it doesn't get you into a row." 84

"And if it did——?"

"Well, a chap doesn't like getting people into rows. Look here—that beggar wants talking to!"

Louie dropped her eyes. "I've been in rows before," she said.

Instantly he cheered up. "Oh, I see! You mean it wouldn't be much?"

"Well, your aunt can't exactly skin me." At the recollection of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith she glanced with satisfaction at her hands.

"Oh, I'll make that all right with her," said Roy Lovenant-Smith hopefully.

She looked at him. He *was* an innocent! "You know what that would mean?" she said.

"What?"

"Well, merely that you wouldn't see me again."

His look too rested on her hands. "Why?" he asked.

She straightened herself. "Oh, never mind about it. I'm going now."

He coloured a little. "But I say—Louie—you don't mind my calling you Louie, do you? I used to, you know.—I should like to see you again."

"Perhaps you'd better not," she said, with great demureness.

"Oh, rot!" he expostulated. "A fellow can't get a girl into a mess and then leave her in the lurch!"

"You'd like to see me just once again, to see whether I'd got into a row or not?"

"That's what I mean."

It wasn't what Louie had meant him to mean, but "Well, once, if you like," she conceded.

"All right. What about here, at this time to-morrow?" 85

"I'll see if I can get away from my studies."

"Right. And if I see that chap in Mazzicombe, may I say anything to him?"

"Please don't."

"Not about not taking his hat off?"

"Oh, they don't trouble about that sort of thing here."

"Well, they jolly well ought. All right, I won't. Good-bye——"

"Good-bye."

He took his board and followed Priddy; she turned back to the college. She laughed again. At any rate, a lark with a pleasant image was better than a hole-in-corner, Miss Hastings affair with a gardener. She would *not* "coiffe Sainte Catherine."

She duly got her wigging. She was put "on her honour" by Mrs. Lovenant-Smith not to see the young man again who had betrayed the confidence put in him. This struck her as quite richly arrogant. To be put "on your honour" by somebody before whom you stand mute as a fish, and to have it assumed that you accept the bond, was the *largior ether* indeed. Louie did not even feel called upon to say that she declined to consider herself bound. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith might take her "off her honour" again. She met Roy scarcely three hours later. The interview he himself had had with his aunt in the meantime affected the situation but little; his centre-board was now patched up, and the withdrawing of the privilege of the carpenter's shed made no difference.

They met again on the afternoon following that, and again on the one after that. Louie found herself hoping that Izzard, whoever he was, would not return from "over there" just yet. Let somebody else attend to the hair-combing of the Saint. 86

A score of different things contributed to her enjoyment of that affair of atmosphere—her "lark." First, the initiative was hers—for her empty-eyed statue accepted everything with as much candour as if he had been born into a virgin world on the eighth day of its creation. Next, the mere disregarding of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith was a pleasure she felt it incumbent upon herself not to forgo. Next, there was the instinctive courage with which she translated her sulks into carelessness and gaiety. Next—but allow what you will for the rest: pique, vanity, her derivation, her upbringing. When, the third time she met Roy by the stile, the half-French girl, Pigou, came

upon them, and instantly flew to spread the news among such girls as still remained at Chesson's, Louie's Coventry was the coveted thing she had all along intended it should be.

For she was more than merely popular now; she was romantic, apart, a being to be looked up to with something like awe. Meet a young man! She felt herself to be the channel by which every girl in the place might have access to her own dreams. They gave her longing glances, that mutely implored her to tell them all, all about it; she talked about everything else, but not about that, and hearts and mouths watered. They offered to do things for her—to carry her mattress, to do her Sunday watering, even to clean her bicycle; and Louie let them—but told them nothing. Nay, she even drew Richenda Earle to herself. Richenda actually carried her mattress to the foot of the hill one night and slept out. The two mattresses were placed not six feet apart, and, as the birds settled on the boughs and the stars came out, Richenda set herself wistfully to pump Louie. 87

Then it appeared why Richenda had seemed changed since her vacation. Speaking in a low voice, she too admitted that there was now—Somebody. Weston, his name was, Louie learned, and he was some sort of a commercial schoolmaster at the same place in Holborn where Richenda herself had studied. So instead of Richenda pumping Louie, Louie pumped Richenda. What was her Mr. Weston like? Well (Richenda said), some might think him an oddity—the Secretary Bird, his nickname was—but he was, oh, a soul so sensitive, so gentle! Was there any prospect of their marrying soon? Richenda sighed; it would be a long time; if she got her post at Chesson's he might apply for a country schoolmastership somewhere near, and then she would get a bicycle; or if he got a "rise" in London she might relinquish her appointment—when she got it. But in any case it could hardly be for years. Louie asked flatly what Weston got, and was told one hundred pounds a year. She looked up in surprise. Her own dress allowance was treble that amount.

"And you'd get a hundred here too?" she asked.

"If I get the place—which means if I get my medal," said Richenda.

Then, Louie thought, that would be two hundred between them—two-thirds of her dress allowance.

"But—but——," she said, "I thought people got paid more than that!"

"I told you you didn't know," said Richenda softly.

"But—but—why, my aunt paid Miss Skrine one hundred and fifty pounds, just to go through her engagements, opening bazaars and charities and so on—just to write down on a slate what she had to do each day!" 88

"Your aunt's Lady Moone," came from Richenda's couch.

"I *know* she got one hundred and fifty pounds, *and* lived with them. One hundred pounds seems absurd."

"That's what father said when he apologised to me."

"But surely, all—all the people one sees aren't paid at that rate! Why, some cooks get a thousand—I've heard that for a fact——"

"Some don't," came from the other pillow.

"Well, some do, and if you strike an average, or whatever it's called——"

But Richenda interrupted, softly and wearily:

"Oh, you don't, don't, don't know."

Louie asked further questions. She frowned, puzzled, at the answers. Of course Richenda herself wasn't a very effective sort of girl; if anybody had to be downtrodden it would very likely be she; but the things she was telling her now (Richenda had begun to talk again, resignedly rather than bitterly) were preposterous. There must be something wrong with Richenda, probably with her Weston too; she did not look quite right; she was very different from the rosy housemaids at Trant, for example. One hundred pounds a year!... She had forgotten all about Roy. When, presently, Richenda came as near to putting a question about him as she dared, she forgot about him again. One hundred pounds a year!... She lay on her back, her knees up, her hands behind her head, her sleeves fallen from her wonderful arms, the brows above the grey eyes knitted. She was sure that *she* could do better than that! She even went so far as to say so. Richenda showed no resentment. 89

"You've got Lord Moone behind you," she said.

"I've got a prizefighter and a public-house behind me," Louie replied.

"Yes—I know you think you know——"

Louie lay awake, still pondering it all, long after Richenda had fallen into an uneasy sleep.

On the following afternoon she met Roy by the stile again. She was restless, unsettled, she knew not what. She spoke almost sharply to him.

"I'm not going to stand here with you," she said; "that's twice I've been seen. Come down the hill."

Roy no longer urged the Rules. They walked together a hundred yards down the hill, and sat down under a gorse-bush. He made her move quite behind it, and even then tucked her skirt a little farther out of the gaze of a possible passer-by.

"Now we're all right," he said. "How's Lovey this morning?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her."

"Well, don't bite a fellow's head off, Louie."

"Then don't bother me to-day.—No, I don't want my hand held."

"What's the matter with you?"

"If you don't leave me alone I shall go. I didn't sleep till nearly daylight."

"I didn't sleep for quite an hour, either," he said sympathetically. "I say, isn't it funny, Louie, when you come to think of it, that till a week ago I hadn't thought of you for years?"

"Oh, I wasn't lying awake thinking of you," she said bluntly.

"I was of you." He put out his hand again. 90

His approach only made her impatient. "Oh, don't!" she snapped. "Really I shall get up and go if you worry me."

He was, as he would have put it, "keen": keen enough to begin to sulk. She let him sulk, and watched the sea, always of a milky bloom, and the sky, still of the hue of an infant's eyeball. After some minutes she turned to him again.

"What *do* people get paid?" she asked abruptly.

"What people?" He spoke over his shoulder.

"Oh, people—you know what I mean!"

"We get dashed little, I know that." (He was going into the army.) "What sort of people? Servants and those?"

"And those—yes."

Roy expounded.

"Jolly good pay, *I* call it; lot of lazy beggars! Why, the fellow down there wanted to charge me two pounds for patching up that centre-board, that I did in about a day. I shouldn't mind getting two pounds a day!... Why?"

"I want to know."

"Some of your gardeners been grizzling to you?"

"No."

"A wonder—rotten grousing lot! They ought to have uniforms to buy, and mess-bills and clubs and things; they'd know all about it then! Two pounds for filing a piece of iron and putting a patch on a piece of wood!—I think it will hold all right," he continued naïvely; "we shall make a deuce of a lot of leeway if it doesn't. We're flat-bottomed, you see, with only bilge-keels, and that reminds me; Izzard's coming back on Wednesday; I'd a note from him this morning. But he won't 91
be in the way, dear, if you'll only be friends——"

She could not help laughing. After all, Richenda's "grousing" was a little spoiling her fun. She turned to him again.

"I haven't seen her yet," she said. "Let's go down to her now."

He chuckled mildly. "You do play the dickens with the Rules, Louie."

"Bother the Rules!"

"Well, you don't want to go just this minute; it's jolly here——"

This time she did not withdraw her hand.

But he was very slow, she thought, in kissing her. He had never kissed her yet. What was the good of being caught at—nothing?

Well, statues (she reflected), especially young ones, are slow——

Even as she was thinking it he did that very thing. Perhaps it was to summon up resolution to do so that he had lain awake the previous night. He kissed her cheek.

The result was curious. It was the law of her physique that most moments of perturbation only turned her paler; but at this particular form of perturbation she turned suddenly pink.

In a few moments she was as before. The first sign that she was Louie again was that she forbade him to repeat the offence. He sulked again.

"All right," he said resentfully; "then we may as well go and see the yacht."

"I don't want to see the yacht."

"Well, you needn't be stuffy about it——" 92

Statues *were* distractingly slow!

Then she looked at him with a faintly mocking smile.

"Aren't you going to say you're sorry?" she challenged him (but she had for a moment a faint return of the unhabitual colour for all that).

He seemed to suspect that he was being mocked; nevertheless it was with a rather tremulous boldness that he answered "No."

"Oh!"

"You see," he explained, "you did let me hold your hand."

She caught her breath. Good gracious! Why, he would be saying presently that she had asked him to kiss her! "You see, you did let me hold your hand!" What next?

"You know you did," he argued simply.

Even so it is written, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——"

Suddenly she laughed. O admirable innocence, that alone can defeat guile! After all, it was too unpardonable not to be pardoned. She turned her face away again.

"You *are* stupid!" she murmured, her face, even her neck, pink once more.

At that quite a new gleam seemed to irradiate his good-looking clay.

"I say," he said slowly, as he struggled with the newness of the idea, "you mean—do you mean?—about my not kissing you—properly?"

Oh, the heaviness! But he should kiss her "properly," as he called it, now!

"Oh," she said briskly, "it's too late now. You can't very well after that, can you?" 93

But he beamed. "Of course I can!"

"No, Roy!"

"I will——"

This was outrageous. She made as if to rise.

"No, Roy—no—you know very well you don't think I'm pretty——"

"Well, you aren't ugly," said he.

(Great heavens! She "wasn't ugly"!)

"Very well, Mr. Statue," she thought, compressing those irregular lips whose degree of prettiness he estimated so nicely. "I'm going to be pretty in a very few minutes, and you're going to tell me so."

"No, Roy," she said aloud; "just let's sit and talk—sensibly—I don't know what made you behave like this all of a sudden——"

And there was none to say "Provoking hussy!"

An hour later they rose. It was too late to go to the yacht now. They walked together back to the stile. Their shoulders overlapped. The kisses came easily now.

"Then we'll go aboard her to-morrow?" he said.

"Very well."

"'Once aboard the lugger'—ha, ha—but of course she's a cutter, not a lugger. That's just a saying, 'Once aboard the lugger.'"

"Really?"

"Yes, hadn't you heard it? 'Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine,' it is. And I say, you'd better put some old clothes on if I'm to show you how the centre-board works."

"All right."

"What about Lovey?" he asked once more. 94

"Oh, we write down on a slate where we're going."

He held her a little away. "I—*say*!... You wouldn't tell her where, would you?"

"Why not?"

"What—cheek!"

"She put me 'on my honour'—impudence!" quoth Louie.

"But I say—what frightful cheek!"

"Good-bye——"

"Just a minute——"

"Well——"

Then, "'Bye——"

"Good-bye——"

He called her name after her. "Louie!"

"What?"

"Good-bye——"

"Good-bye, boy——" She waved her hand.

Anyway, she thought with satisfaction, she had made him say—swear—that she was pretty.

The next afternoon, as good as her word, Louie wrote on the hall-slate: "Gone to Mazzicombe: L. Causton." Then she walked, whistling, out of the house and up the hill.

VI

This time she fully expected to catch it, and did catch it. No time was lost. A note from Mrs. Lovenant-Smith just before supper ordered her to report herself immediately after that meal. At a quarter past nine she presented herself.

The French window stood wide open, but night was fast falling over the front lawn, and a clipped 95
peacock of box showed against a brownish-green sky. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith stood by the window. It moved as she turned, and there swung slowly across the pane the reflection of the tall, yellow-shaded standard-lamp in one corner. Miss Harriet Chesson had followed Louie in. In her hand was a piece of paper—Louie's "conduct-report."

The beginning of the encounter was no skirmish; its end was positive slaughter. This is no place for a report of it, round by round; it must be summarised, even as the "Life and Battles" summarises the combat between Buck and the terrible Piker. Louie "led," so to speak, by asking whether she might sit down, giving as her reason that she had had a long walk that afternoon; permission was only refused her after she had put her hand on the back of a wheatear chair and said again: "I think you said Yes?" She then placed the chair for Miss Harriet to sit on, as near as possible to that of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith. She herself stood in the middle of the room.

Miss Harriet, evidently wishing she was somewhere else, read aloud the conduct-report. It was longish and detailed. It also, as Louie well knew, did not contain one of the real points at issue. She looked from one to the other of the two women. The Lady-in-Charge wore a discreetly-necked evening frock, with a fichu secured by a mourning brooch; and her fingers kept touching this brooch, and also kept leaving it again, as if Louie's eyes had been capable of a physical plucking of them away. She had had Miss Harriet in, Louie knew, for moral support. The principal's dress, too, was a give-and-take between her gardening costume and conventional evening attire. Her indictment read, she seemed more than ever anxious to depart. Louie, for her part, was rather 96
glad that she had been called in. Buck had always fought better for the eyes upon him.

Mrs. Lovenant-Smith began correctly; her first trace of acerbity showed only when Louie, having listened to her arraignment with downcast eyes, lifted them for a moment to make a modest and quite immaterial correction.

"Have the goodness to cease this exaggerated deference, Miss Causton. It doesn't deceive me. It's only a form of veiled insolence."

Louie heard her indictment out in silence.

First blood was drawn when Louie mentioned the name of Roy Lovenant-Smith. She called him, with aggravating naturalness, "Roy." Mrs. Lovenant-Smith rose nearly an inch in height.

"'Roy!'" she echoed. "'Roy,' indeed!"

"I quite expected Priddy would tell you that first time. Of course he would. The gardeners here don't like outsiders intruding," said Louie.

The point told. There was no need to mention the name of Miss Hastings. Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's face deepened its ochre.

"Go on, Miss Causton," she said; while Miss Harriet timidly interposed: "I think that's all you wanted me for?"

Louie went on. "And anyway, you gave your nephew permission to come on the premises, which seems to me quite as much against the Rules as anything there." She pointed to the charge-sheet.

"Pray go on, Miss Causton," said Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, swallowing her wrath. Piker Betteridge, counting the moral advantage to be more than the pain endured, had formerly been wont to thrust out his undefended jaw in order to prove its invulnerability to attack; Mrs. Lovenant-Smith was doing something of the same kind now. 97

"Pray go on——" she said.

"And of course that's all bunkum," said Louie, warming, and pointing once more to the paper in Miss Harriet's hand. "That isn't in the least what you mean. What you really hate is my having told the girls what you've had in your mind ever since I came—I mean about my father."

"Pray go on!" The jaw was thrust out once more.

("Perhaps I'd better go?" Miss Harriet still fidgeted. Seedsmen's daughters are not at their ease at these Olympian conflicts.)

"All right, I will go on," said Louie, warming still more. "You would have preferred me to hold my tongue about it, and if you're thinking of asking me to resign I should like to say now that probably at least half-a-dozen others will go with me."

Here, however, Mrs. Lovenant-Smith scored a point.

"That may have been true a little while ago," she said, "but—go on." And Louie remembered certain little incidents and unbendings that had caused it to be indulgently rumoured that "Lovey wasn't such a bad old sort once you got to know her." Louie conceded the point.

"Anyway, that's what she does mean," she said, turning to Miss Harriet—"that she didn't want me to tell them that my father was a prizefighter and kept a public-house!"

"Address yourself to me, if you please," ordered Mrs. Lovenant-Smith.

"Certainly! You've been set against me from the first, for that very reason; and as for your nephew, I've known him for years and years, and you've no business at all to have him here, and it would sound rather well, wouldn't it, if the tale got about that you allowed——" 98

But at this Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's hardly held composure gave way with a snap. Well-born but necessitous Ladies-in-Charge of horticultural colleges do not submit to being told their duty by the daughters of pugilists. She stamped on the floor.

"Silence!" she cried, shaking. "I was a fool ever to have had you here! You make discipline impossible. You corrupt your fellow-students—you make a boast of your unfortunate parentage—you show no respect for the Rules—you think yourself at liberty to come and go as you please—you carry on a vulgar intrigue——"

"—not with a gardener——"

("Oh, I *really* must go my rounds!" murmured Miss Harriet; but she lingered; the spectacle of Olympians forgetting themselves does not occur every day.)

"—disgracing yourself among younger and more innocent girls——"

"—with a Lovenant-Smith, anyway——"

Again the stamp. "I forbid you to mention his name!"

"Roy——"

"Leave the room!"

("Please, please!" besought Miss Harriet.)

"You will pack your boxes at once!"

"I shall consult Lord Moone's lawyer first. You accepted my fees—your college is an imposition from beginning to end, and I'll see that's known. That will be another scandal——"

"Ah!" choked Mrs. Lovenant-Smith, perhaps with some hazy recollection of the law of slander in her head. "You hear that, Miss Chesson? You hear that? You heard those words?" 99

"No, I didn't quite catch—ladies—please!"

"If you didn't catch it, I said the whole place was a shameless fraud," said Louie calmly.

"Very good. Ring the bell, Miss Chesson!"

But the servant appeared only in time to see Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's complete collapse. She sank, shaking, into a chair, and gazed unseeingly into a pigeon-hole of her desk, as if she might find some help against this devilish girl there. As she clung (as it were) to the ropes, Louie let her have it (so to speak) on the beezer.

"You oughtn't to be here at all, really, you know," she said. "You ought to be in one of those places—you know—in the Queen's gift, at Kensington or Hampton Court, with the dowagers and

maids-of-honour. If you like I'll ask my uncle whether he can't do anything."

And without waiting for an answer she swept out, not by the door, but by the French window. The reflection of the yellow-shaded standard-lamp swung again as she did so.

She entered the courtyard by the side door, passed under the dark yew and the arch beneath the box-room, and made her way through the orchard. She had reached her pitch at the foot of the hill before she remembered that she had forgotten her mattress and blankets. She returned in search of them. Twenty minutes later she was in bed, her knees up, her hands clasped behind her head.

She was white with triumph. That woman! Well, Louie thought she had held her own. She had had the last word, at all events, and an optic-bunging one too. Now should she leave, or stay? It was entirely a question of balance between her desire to see the last of the place and her resolve 100
to go at nobody's pleasure but her own. It might be that she would have to stay another week in order to avoid the suspicion that she was turning tail. The fraud of a place!

She lay, pale and victorious, thinking the matter over.

One thing was certain; she would not return to Trant. She supposed she was vindictive by nature, but that would merely mean at the most a week's gradually increasing strain on her temper and then another series of embroilings with her mother. A philosophic elf somewhere deep within her —it was hardly affection—bade her spare her mother what she had not spared Mrs. Lovenant-Smith. Why seek a known trouble at Trant? If she must take trouble with her wherever she went, she might as well take it to a fresh place.

Before she was aware they had done so, her thoughts had flown to the vouched-for but incredible things Richenda Earle had said about life and London.

Lord Moone had a house, and Captain Chaffinger chambers, in London, and she knew both. For the rest, her knowledge of the place was pretty much what Richenda had guessed it to be—shops, restaurants, theatres. Of her five visits two had been spent at Lord Moone's, two at Cynthia's friends, the Kayes, and one at an hotel—this not counting the night on which, having run away from the convent, she had occupied Chaff's room and had wondered at his large pincushion, his pictures, and ribboned haircurlers that he doubtless kept in memory of his departed youth.

Her father, too, lived in London, or thereby——

She fell to wondering about her father.

There was a full but late-rising moon that night; it had not yet cleared the tree-tops of the eastern 101
end of the orchard below. She watched its silver through the topmost boughs. Already it filled the heavens with a mist of light, dimming the stars; the glister on near leaves was brighter than the Plough over her head. Scents of the distant gardens stole undispersed through the night; that of the night-flowering tobacco-plant was for some minutes almost sicklily oppressive; and behind her she heard the scurrying of the rabbits at play.

It was odd that she thought of her father rather than of Roy. Somehow only Roy's actual presence had the power to colour those now pale cheeks of hers. Certainly it had done so that afternoon. For an hour, aboard the yacht, the rose-peonies in the garden had been paler than she. But her father had her thoughts now, and the sum of them was that she would have given much to be able to think of him as not cruel, not faithless, not a man who had had to be thrust back into the ditch whence he had come. She might have sought him out then.

For she was going to London; that was settled. She had her allowance, more by a half than the income Richenda and her Mr. Weston would gladly have married on, and not one penny more of it would she waste at Chesson's. The next day or two would almost certainly provide her with a "good exit." Then nobody would be able to say she had slunk out.

Oh, if her father had but not been a brute!

The moon cleared the trees, and another too-sweet tract of the night-flowering tobacco enveloped her. A bird or two stirred. Some time before she had thought she had heard the sound of a curlew's whistle, low and not very near, but she had disregarded it. Now it came again. All the 102
effect it had was to turn her thoughts, tardily and almost unnoticed by herself, to Roy.

She knew little about yachts; yachting was no pastime of Lord Moone's; but even her vaunting mood relaxed to a momentary smile as she remembered the yacht down under the hill there. Those two boys must be crazy to risk their lives like that. They had rounded Land's End in her, and in quite good faith evidently expected the miracle to be repeated. The only wonder was that the centre-board had gone before the rest of the crazy fabric. "I told you to put some old clothes on," Roy had apologised for his vessel, "—and I say—I don't think I'd sit on the table if I were you —I'm not *quite* sure about it, you see—may have to send it to Mazzicombe after all—come on the locker." So they had sat on the locker——

She had felt safer when, half-an-hour later, she had clambered down into the little dinghy again. It would be Davy Jones's locker for Master Roy and his friend Mr. Izzard unless some fatherly fisherman took them and their boat in hand.

Then came the thoughts of her unknown father again.

"*Ee-oooo-eee!*"

She sat up. The whistle came from the stile up the hill. And suddenly she knew it was no curlew. It was Roy.

She listened.

"*Ee-oooo-eee!*"

It was Roy.

She knew he would not seek her farther than the stile. Had there not been other sleepers just below the orchard, it would still have been the extreme of his boldness that he had got so far. But —she remembered how from the first she had been the prime mover in their entirely wanton flirtation—was it necessarily the extreme of hers? 103

Then, as the devil would have it, something brought Mrs. Lovenant-Smith into her head again.

That woman!

All the blood left her cheeks and thronged to her heart again.

Roy would certainly not pass the stile——

She hesitated for a moment longer, and then suddenly got up from her bed.

Her clothes were wrapped in her waterproof; she took the waterproof and put it on. She thrust her feet into a pair of slippers. The waterproof was not so long as the garment beneath it; the moon was now well above the trees; it showed the hurrying white about her heels as she walked quickly up the hill. She drew the under-garment up a little. The waterproof was almost the colour of the scorched grass. The small shadow that preceded her was now the thing most plainly to be seen.

Over the stile she saw the shoulder of his white sweater. Again her caution awoke.

"You might have put a coat on," she said, a little out of breath. "You can be seen half-a-mile away on a night like this."

"I thought you were never going to hear me!" he said.

"Oh! You seem to have been sure I'd come if I did."

"Well, you have come, haven't you?" he answered. "I say, isn't your hair different?"

"Well, it isn't done for a call, if that's what you mean; I always do it like that at night, stupid. But I'm not going to stand here with you as white as a cottage wall." 104

Thereupon he paid her the only compliment he ever did pay her—and that was unintentional.

"It isn't any whiter than your feet, anyway," he said.

"Well, I'm not going to stop a minute."

"Oh, dash it all!" he protested. She did think him cool!

"Good gracious, how long do you think I *am* going to stay?"

"Hardly worth coming for, I call it," he grumbled.

"*Thank* you!"

"For you, I mean, of course—as if you didn't know I'd walk miles—how you take a fellow up!"

"Well, two minutes."

Two minutes can be a very short time; five minutes had passed when, making a movement to free herself, she said: "Let me go now, Roy—I think we're both as mad as we can be."

"There isn't anybody about," he muttered.

More minutes passed; then:

"Do you really think my feet are white?" she whispered. A slipper had come off.

Then, close against his breast, she made an inconsequential, halting little appeal. "Oh, Roy—don't go in that dreadful boat again! You'll be drowned—I know you will——"

"Should you care?" he whispered.

"Silly boy!"

"No, but should you care?"...

"Roy, let me go!" she ordered suddenly. The minutes were passing fatally quickly.

"No—no——"

"Oh—yes——" 105

"I won't let you go."

"Roy, let me go, I say!"

But it was not a command now. It was a supplication—perhaps not even that.

She did not love him; in her heart she knew she did not love him. He loved her—years afterwards; only years afterwards. The thought of her left him—but it returned to him, never to leave him again. The moon made the crest of the hill like day, but the shadows of the gorse-bushes lay dark on the short grass and stunted bents and the patches of wild thyme. The moon southed, then rode less high. In the short night a lamb called; and then the birds, reaching the shallows of their sleep, gave a drowsy twittering and went to sleep again. It was the false dawn. The stars grew a little brighter as a deeper darkness possessed the earth; then in the darkness a cock crowed.

They met again on the next night. On the night after that they met once more.

Only after that did she sit down, alone in the box-room, in the twilight, to think.

Her boxes were packed and strapped, and the cart was coming for them from Rainham Magna in the morning.

She wished Burnett Minor had been there. She would have liked to say good-bye to the child. There was nobody else it would break her heart to leave.

Yet Roy was still down there under the hill. The centre-board had gone wrong again. She was to see him at the stile, in the morning, before leaving. It seemed, somehow, superfluous.

But she did meet him. His face was set, and he had forgotten to shave. 106

"Don't look like that; it wasn't your fault," she said composedly.

"It was—it was——" he muttered, hands clenched.

"Rubbish!" She gave a short laugh. "You've nothing at all to blame yourself for."

"Oh, I have—I have."

Then he turned to her. "Louie, you've got to promise me one thing——"

But she stopped him. She knew what he was going to say.

"That's quite out of the question," she said.

"But look here!" He used the words he had used the second time they had met. "A fellow can't get a girl into a mess and then leave her in the lurch. You must marry me, Louie, if—if——"

At that she had found a touch of her old irony.

"Not unless, of course?"

"Oh yes—yes."

But she turned away. "No. Good-bye."

"Won't you even kiss me?"

"No."

But there was a gentleness in her refusal such as he had never had from her before. Kisses came hardly now.

PART II
SUTHERLAND PLACE

109

I

Richenda Earle could have told Louie Causton that an allowance of three hundred pounds a year, paid in quarterly instalments, only permits of a sunny little bedroom and a charming sitting-room in Lancaster Gate on certain terms, of which terms a dipping sooner or later into reserves of capital is certainly one. It is true that Louie still had capital of which she knew nothing. She did not yet, for example, count her wardrobe as capital, nor reflect that if its present standard was to be maintained money must be set apart for the purpose of maintaining it. She did not yet count her time as capital, nor write off the days she classed as days of "looking about her" as so many

obligations against the time when looking about her would no longer serve her turn. She did not count her health as capital, nor her wild, resilient spirits, nor her "placeableness" at a glance among those whose possession of some capital may be assumed. All she reckoned as capital was the hundred odd pounds she had placed in a small but sound bank of her stepfather's recommendation, and (she had vaguely heard of such things) such additional credit as the Captain's name might command. But perhaps it is enough to say that she had this conception of the potency of the Captain's name.

Nevertheless, her second week's bill at Lancaster Gate was enough to cause her to send for her landlady, and to ask that person whether she had not a single room anywhere empty that might combine the prettiness of her present quarters with the convenience of having all her belongings within a single door. She was conscious of reasonableness, almost of magnanimity, when she remarked that she didn't mind going up another flight of stairs. The landlady had such a room, but pointed out its lack of cupboard-space and the number of Louie's dresses. That, Louie replied, did not matter; she intended to sell a number of the older dresses; and her things were carried upstairs. 110

Her idea in selling the older dresses was that thereby she might add another thirty pounds or so to her balance; the half-dozen she thought she could spare had cost thrice that amount. The wardrobe dealer who waited upon her offered her five pounds for them. Louie thanked her, told her that she had thoughts of going into a business so lucrative herself, and bade her good-afternoon.

She had come to London at the beginning of September; before that month was out she had decided to leave Lancaster Gate. For some reason or other her quarter's allowance had not arrived, and she wrote to Chaff about it. Chaff promised to look to the matter. She wrote also to Richenda Earle, stating the kind of lodging she required, and asking whether Richenda knew of such an one. To this last letter she had a reply by return of post. Richenda proposed the house of her married sister, which was in Sutherland Place, Bayswater. Without prejudice to her choice, Louie took a walk along Sutherland Place, and received an impression of a quiet street with milk-carts drawn up by the kerb and virginia creeper covering the houses with crimson. As she passed the door Richenda had specified, the door opened, and a squarer and older Richenda came out with a string bag in her hand. That, Louie thought, would be Mrs. Leggat, the wife of the estate-agent's clerk. 111

A week later Louie moved into Mrs. Leggat's first floor-front-bed-sitting-room. That night she counted her money. The result of her calculations caused her to jump up, as if she had thoughts of seeking some occupation or other that very night. Her quarter's allowance had still not come. Then Mr. Leggat, a lumpy-headed man with rabbit teeth and a Duke of Wellington nose, came in to fix a gas-burner for her, and she fell into talk with him. He wiped his hands ceaselessly on an old rag as he talked. He told her it was a pity that Rich had not stuck to her book-keeping; he himself would have been head clerk by this time had he had her thorough practical grounding instead of having had to knock about the world and fend for himself; and he asked her what sort of a villa-building-site Rainham Parva would, in her opinion, make. He added that it was nice to have "the rooms" (he used the plural) let to somebody they knew something about, and then, having omitted to shake hands with her on coming in, did so before going out, and evidently accounted their introduction complete. He came back presently for a pair of pincers he had forgotten, left her a Carter Paterson card for her window in case she should have need of one, said that one of these Sundays they must all go round to the Earles in Westbourne Grove to tea, made a pun on the words Earle and Lord, and went out again. An hour later Louie heard him tiptoeing discreetly past her door on his way upstairs to bed.

Louie was resolved, however, to put a stop to the "Earle and Lord" business once for all. She was a Causton, not a Scarisbrick, in Sutherland Place.

She felt herself to be already on the verge of a new life that was—let us say amusing—precisely in proportion as it was different from any life she had ever known. She must be—if the word may pass—amused; she told herself so, clinching the argument by adding that it was far better to laugh than to cry. She had promised Richenda that she would call and see her Mr. Weston at his Business School in Holborn; and this might be—well, amusing. She went without loss of time. She took the Oxford Street bus one morning and alighted at the door of the School. 112

She mounted three floors of narrow, old-fashioned stairs, asked a fair, perky boy, who somehow managed to make a good suit of clothes look cheap, where she should find Mr. Weston, and presently found herself introducing herself to a thin and melancholy-looking man with a sparse and colourless beard, a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, and a gentle and hopeless voice. This was "the Secretary Bird," then. He shook hands slackly with her, placed a chair for her in one of the bays of a sort of **E** that was lined with books of reference, and she listened to his soft, dispirited voice and to the clicking of typewriters in an adjoining room. He thanked her for "all her kindnesses" to Richenda, whatever these might have been, and presently a skimpy little woman in green plaid, with eyes that peered quizzically behind spectacles and "destined spinster" written all over her, tiptoed for a moment at the end of the bay of books, uncertain whether to approach. Then the fair, perky boy who made good clothes look cheap also came up. Mr. Weston said: "Excuse me—yes, Miss Windus?" Louie saw that she was interrupting the morning's work. She rose.

"I daresay we shall see one another again," she said. "Good-bye."

And, outside on the Holborn pavement again, she said to herself with decision: "Thanks—but no Business Schools for me!—Poor Richenda!" 113

Three weeks later she became a student at that very school.

There is no puzzle about it. Some things come no less unexpectedly that they are more than reasonably to be expected. To put this as briefly as it can be put, she had merely discovered that an affair of atmosphere had become an affair of fact. That was all—nothing more, nothing less. But that was no reason why she should not be amused.

The natural thing for young women in such circumstances to do is to seek their mothers. If Louie did this natural thing a little unnaturally—well, she did it unnaturally, that was all. The row, scene, or whatever it was going to be, had better be got over; then she could proceed to amuse herself. She had wired that she was coming; the Captain had met her at Trant station; but she had had nothing to say to the Captain.

The Captain, however, had had something to say to her. At first his mumbling into his moustache had not penetrated to her intelligence; she had only heard broken repetitions of "Dear old Mops —only for a week or two—knew you weren't without—meant to write, but dashed awkward thing to explain by letter, and was coming up in a week in any case—if she stuck fast he'd see what could be done——"

"Eh?" Louie had said at last. "What's that, Chaff?"

Chaff had repeated his mumblings. At the end of them she had gathered that the needy Captain had borrowed the quarter's allowance that had been entrusted to him for despatch. Louie had 114 merely given a little preoccupied laugh and patted his hand.

"All right, old boy; don't worry," she had said.

A sample or two of her conversation with her mother must answer for the rest. For quite twenty minutes the Honourable Emily's head had been buried in the sofa-cushions, and the Trant coal-and-blanket charitable account had lain where it had fallen from her hand—across her cheek.

"That's all," Louie had ended with hard composure.

"Oh—oh——" the mother had moaned.

"And as I say, I won't marry him."

"Oh—you must—you must!"

"Why? Because Uncle Augustus will say I must?"

"Oh—you must!"

"I'll go and see Uncle Augustus."

"Oh, you mustn't—you mustn't!"

Then, in an interlude, the reasons why everything must at all costs be kept from Lord Moone had been brokenly explained. In another interlude a few minutes later Louie had invented a fictitious name.

"That conveys nothing to me," Mrs. Chaffinger had moaned. "What is he?"

Louie had invented a station in life to fit the name. Her mother's face had disappeared behind the coal-and-blanket account again.

"And this—this!—is your study of horticulture!" she had half faintingly wailed.

"Yes. Yours was art, wasn't it?"

Then Mrs. Chaffinger's querulous despair had shown a weak, vindictive gleam. Both pronouns had been a little emphasised as she had retorted:

"I married your father!" 115

It was only a flicker. Her head had gone into the cushions again.

"That didn't last very long," the devilish girl had commented.

"I married your father, I say—for your sake," had come from the cushions.

"That's one of the differences. There are others. If you're thinking of wiring to Uncle Augustus I'll wait; if you're not, I'll go."

Lord Moone had been wired for. He had wired back: "Impossible"; but a second wire had brought him over post-haste the next morning. The situation had been explained to him; the peer had walked away for a few moments; Louie had thought she had heard something about "our damnable women"; then, coming back, Lord Moone had abruptly convened a Committee of Ways and Means. Words like "Impossible ... once in a lifetime quite enough ... secrecy ... the Continent for a few months ... institution," had been used; and at one other alternative Louie's eyes had become hard and chill as ice.

"Thank you," she had come harshly in. "As you say, all these things may be possible. I decline them all."

Then Lord Moone, whose habit of ordering masses of men probably misled him into thinking that the ordering of one young woman who says "I won't" was a comparatively simple matter, had made his pronouncement.

"Very well," he had said. "Then as head of the family I order that your allowance shall be stopped till you come to your senses. You hear that, Emily?"

"You mean you'll starve me out?" Louie had said, with dancing eyes. Like her father, she came up to time as long as she could stand. 116

"I mean what I've said."

"Then ring the bell, please—and don't light that cigar till I've gone. I shall be ill if you do."

And Lord Moone himself had ordered the carriage in which she had turned her back on Trant.

Burnett Minor, when Mrs. Lovenant-Smith had surprised the rebellion in the box-room, had not made herself more inconspicuous than had Captain Chaffinger during this scene. Indeed, probably considering that Lord Moone, his sister and Louie herself formed a quorum, he had presently been discovered to be not there. But it seemed to be the Captain's lot to receive and despatch Louie in her comings and goings, and before the carriage had reached the lodge he had stopped it and climbed in. Ordinarily, the whites of the Captain's eyes had yellowish marblings; the yellow had now deepened to the hue of cayenne. He had blown his nose repeatedly and violently, and Louie, glancing covertly at him, had suddenly had a pang. All at once he had shown his age. Somehow Louie resented his doing so. People and things you have never taken quite seriously have no right to come near the tragic. It was as if some puppet strutting within a proscenium should suddenly bleed.

"Mops," he had said by-and-by, blowing his nose again, "that was a lie you told them, wasn't it?"

Louie had tried to shut her eyes to Chaff's bleeding. Her hand had sought his.

"The name I told them? Of course it was, you clever old Chaff, to see that."

"You don't tell me that, do you, Mops?"

"You?! No, poor old boy, it isn't worth while telling lies to you." 117

"I'm glad of that, Mops——"

So, for his private comfort, she had invented for Chaff quite a new lie, name, station in life and all.

Then: "Oh, Mops, Mops, Mops!——" he had murmured sorrowfully.

Little parties were one thing, but his Mops quite another.

But her anger had stirred again. She had remembered her uncle's proposals.

"Did you hear what he said—Moone? No; you'd gone out. Listen——"

He had tugged unhappily at his moustache as she had told him, bringing out the words with vehemence and hate.

"Well, but, Mops——" he had demurred wistfully.

"What, are you going to tell me *you* think so too?"

"All right, Mops, all right, all right, old girl——"

"Much I care for him and his family name! He could bully mother into marrying people, but he can't bully me.... Sorry, Chaff, that was clumsy; we're pals at any rate. Uncle Gus and his Scarisbricks!"

Her exclamations of contempt had occupied the rest of the time to the station. Chaff had put her into her carriage.

"You'll let me know where you are and what you're doing, won't you, dear?" he had pleaded. "I can't let you go like this!"

"I hardly know where I shall be myself yet. Very likely I shall go to a Business School; I shall have to do something, and that's all I know anything about. Anyway, the bank will find me—no, you poor old thing, of course I don't mean the money! Of course I'll ask you for that when I want it. 118 I've quite a lot yet. Good-bye, old thing."

"Good-bye, dear."

And this time he had not warned her not to run away with a student of book-keeping.

She went to the Business School partly (*bien entendu*) for amusement, and partly because there would be very little sense in sitting all day long in Mrs. Leggat's first-floor bed-sitter in

Sutherland Place, Bayswater. Perhaps, too, Lord Moone helped to drive her there. Her very skin crept when she remembered the lengths to which he would have gone—he, the corner-stone of orthodoxy when such subjects came up for (very) full-dress debate—to save that precious thing, the family name of the Scarisbricks. Louie had had vanities of person, scores of them; but she had also the sense of the holiness of the body, and she had had enough of Trants and Mallard Boises and their masters for a time. The Business School would be as amusing as anywhere else; indeed, she knew of nowhere else. Here she was at last in a London that was not the London of shops and dinners and theatres and drives in the Park. She would have the fun—always the fun—of it. She would go with the Leggats to see Richenda's sisters and that father of hers who had apologised to her for having brought her into the world. She would learn these unfamiliar accents that met her ear, breathe this invigorating if dusty air. She would know what life meant to that skimpy woman in the green plaid, would inspect that new specimen, the jaunty boy who made his good clothes look like an ordinary "reach-me-down." And she knew, without knowing how she 119
knew, that before long she would be seeing her father. Sit in Sutherland Place? Oh no, that wasn't amusing. Besides, she would presently have her living to earn. She had thought, when Richenda had told her those dismal tales, that there must be something wrong with Richenda and that she herself would be able to do better. Well, she would very soon know.

II

At Chesson's she had taken her proper place among her fellow-students at once; it was not her fault if here, at the Business School, she did not at first so much make friends as watch a number of amusing phenomena. She watched them with wonder; all was so very, very different. The building itself seemed once to have been some sort of a dwelling-house, for there were cabbagey wall-papers of a bygone fashion on the walls, broken ends of bell-wire stuck out from the mantel-sides and the cornices, and the gas-brackets were old and ornate and grimy. Louie was conscious of something like a shock the first time she approached one of the third-floor bay windows and, looking across the street, saw in the windows opposite men packing things in brown paper, waitresses carrying trays, and gas-jets burning in the dark interiors beyond. They seemed so near. The width of Holborn lay between, but they seemed to crowd on her much more closely than the yew at Rainham Parva had ever crowded on the inner windows of the courtyard. The yew, moreover, was thinned at intervals, but there was no cutting and lopping the forward-thrusting, amusing humanity across the way. They seemed to be caged there expressly for her observation. Well, she was there to observe—to observe, and, of course, to be amused. 120

Her new companions, too, were unlike anybody she had ever known; they no more resembled them than the sweet heavy airs of Chesson's resembled these diverting smells of dust and damp and bad ventilation and the whiff of the Holborn pavement below. Their accents (amusing, however) struck her sharply; their faces—alert, sophisticated, highly entertaining but without candour—no less sharply. They too, like the buildings across the way, seemed to ignore intervening space and to press intrusively forward to look at her. She was glad that the first thing she had done had been to stop Mr. Weston's mouth on the subject of the Scarisbricks and Lord Moone; half the drollery of her experience would have gone had these people known who she really was. And the things these slovenly voices said had no candour. They struck her as a series of (merry) "scorings-off," a succession of (cheery) "chippings" of one another. If their reticences seemed all in the wrong places, and hand in hand with their defensiveness went an eager volubility about the things Louie would have kept to herself, why, so much the more laughable the whole joke.

She had been only just in time in extorting her promise from Mr. Weston. She was sure of this from his manner of speaking to herself. It was extremely, syllabically distinct. To words that he had been pronouncing correctly and without thought all his life he gave (as if he must find something superior for her, and knowing better all the time) pronunciations marvellously new. He found new words, too; must look 'em up, Louie thought, in the dictionary. Richenda, who had begun by being his sweetheart, became his "intended," and once even his "inamorata." But he 121
was to be trusted. Louie saw that. If he gave away her identity at all it would be only by the portentousness of his secrecy. As a matter of fact he never did so.

It was the skimpy woman in the green plaid, Miss Windus, who answered most of Louie's questions about her new companions. She too was a delightful novelty to Louie. As if to make her own position quite clear at the outset, she had confided to Louie at once that she herself was "partly independent." Seeing Louie's slightly puzzled look, she had gone on to explain that by this she meant that she enjoyed an income of perhaps a pound a week "on her own." With this title to consideration thoroughly understood, she went ahead. When Louie asked a question about the high-heeled little Cockney Jewess, Miss Levey, Miss Windus answered it in terms of her own pound a week. "Miss Levey?" she said. Oh, she'd nothing; she lived at home and had her fees paid for her, of course, and wouldn't stick fast, being a Jewess, not she; but Kitty didn't suppose Miriam Levey had one shilling to rub against another; not, that was, "on her own." Louie, finding other questions answered from this same standpoint, took her cue and framed her questions accordingly. Had the other female student (there were only four women), Miss Soames, anything? Well, Kitty didn't know; she fancied her aunt must have a tidy bit coming in; they lived together in a boarding-house in Woburn Place, and as the aunt did nothing all day perhaps she too was partly independent, or even wholly so. Had Mr. Merridew, the swaggering boy who cheapened his clothes so curiously, a tidy bit coming in? Here Kitty evidently had a tale to tell. Had Archie Merridew a bit coming in, indeed! Why, his father was Mr. Merridew of Merridew

and Fry's, the fancy stationers with branches everywhere, so Louie could judge for herself whether that meant a bit or not! Archie a bit? Why, Mr. Merridew Senior had retired, and lived at a big place near Guildford, with a tennis-lawn, if you please. Archie Merridew a bit!—Then what about Mr. Mackie? (Louie might have been estimating people by what money they had all her life.)—Mr. Mackie? No, Kitty shouldn't think Mr. Mackie had very much, but he had a splendid "permanency" offered him when he had passed his examinations, as an auctioneer's clerk, four pounds a week to start with—to start with, mind you—and a "rise" every year. Yes; Mr. Mackie was all right, and, oh dear! *wasn't* Mr. Mackie funny? 122

Louie thought this Mr. Mackie more than funny; in her inexperience of the type she could never believe he was quite true. For Mr. Mackie sang songs, imitated music-hall artistes, could "gag" for a whole day on end, and never forget for a moment the immense success he was. He fascinated Louie. "Ladies and bipeds in trousers!" he would begin, with rapid gestures and still more rapid speech, "before the applause I am waiting for has had time to subside—good word, subside—(thank you, Cuthbert, you can take the bouquet round to the stage-door)—as I was saying when Fitzclarence interrupted me, ladies and tripeheads in blouses, whoa, backpedal, never mind—as I was saying, I will now endeavour to give you my celebrated imitation of Roderigo the gasfitter at one o'clock on a Saturday with the thirty bob in his pocket and Hildegarde Ann his wife licking the paint of the lamp-post at the corner to squench her thirst —*heu*, her thirst!... Chord on, please, titillate the catgut, Professor, and take firm hold of his hand, girls——" 123

Then, while the eyes of Lord Moone's niece would grow bigger and bigger, would follow the performance.

"*Isn't* he funny!" Kitty would giggle, faint with laughing; "oh, give us some more, Mr. Mackie!"

And Kitty, like Saint Paul, died daily at yet another trick of Mr. Mackie's—the putting of his handkerchief to his nose, and the drawing of it slowly downwards to the accompaniment of a piercing whistle.

But Louie was only moderately amused by young Merridew. Mr. Mackie had his own perfection; but vulgarity *with* a tennis-lawn! "Good gracious, no," said Louie.

She had entered the School as a day student; but within a week she had put her name down for the evening classes also. Even then she had the evenings of Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and the whole of Sunday quite unamusingly on her hands. She did not want time on her hands. As much Mr. Mackie as you pleased, but no time on her hands. So she joined the classes that met on the evenings of Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

On her very first evening she saw a student whom she had not seen before.

She had taken a text-book on Elementary Book-keeping from one of the shelves of the **E** of books in which she had had her first talk with Mr. Weston (who, by the way, had said that he would like to see her for a few minutes before she left that evening), and finding a chair within the recess, had sat down where she was to read it. She had not looked up when somebody had passed the mouth of her little compartment and entered the next one. She had heard a book taken down from a shelf behind her, and, after some minutes, put back again; and had she not chanced to straighten her back at that moment she would probably not have seen the man repass. She had no time to notice more than that he was very big and not very well dressed. She went on with her reading, wondering, in the intervals of her slack attention to her book, what Mr. Weston wanted with her. 124

She saw the big man again at the close of the class. This time he was standing at the head of the stairs, waiting for young Merridew. He really was immensely big, so big that a too prolonged first look at him seemed unpleasantly like impertinent curiosity. Indeed, he seemed already to feel her eyes upon him, for he moved as if to look back at her in turn; but young Merridew came up at that moment and they went out together. The big man's head and shoulders were to be seen beyond the handrail for quite an appreciable moment of time after young Merridew's had disappeared. But she had been wrong in thinking that he wore a shabby suit. His suit might be shabby also, but it could not be seen. He wore, and had apparently worn in class also, a tawny old ulster of yellow and black check. In spite of its age it seemed somehow a better garment than did the more expensive clothes of his companion. He did not, however, strike her as very amusing.

She turned away to seek the Secretary Bird—Mr. Weston.

For the moment Mr. Weston was engaged. He was standing near the lecture-room blackboard, talking to the girl who lived with her partly independent aunt at the boarding-house in Woburn Place. Louie had already remarked the likeness of this girl, who might have been twenty but looked younger, to Polly Ross, the pretty daughter of the tipsy veterinary surgeon at Trant. Polly too had sported that running of pale blue ribbon beneath the openwork of what Kitty Windus called her "pneumonia blouse," and the clumps of dark hair on her nape too was like Polly's, and she had Polly's dark and sidelong glance, and highly conscious air of unconsciousness when that glance had attracted what it had probably been meant to attract, attention to herself. She had a copy of the Pansy Library in her hand, and Louie smiled as she remembered Burnett Minor and her spoutings. She waited until Weston should be at liberty. 125

As she waited, Kitty Windus, wearing an Inverness cape and a boat-shaped hat, came up. Miss Windus lived in a street off Tottenham Court Road, and already once or twice Louie had walked

with her as far as the Oxford corner. She was waiting for the Polly Ross girl now, whose direction was the same. She asked Louie whether she intended to walk or to "hop on a bus." She always spoke in these rather sprightly terms, just as she always stiffened the line of her back a little the moment a man, any man, entered the room; and she referred, brightly and hopefully, to proposals of marriage as "chances." Louie was already learning when she might expect any given one of Kitty's innumerable *clichés*, and had several times (humorously) given them back to Kitty again with complete success. As they waited for the Polly Ross girl (whose name was Evie Soames) Louie asked Kitty who the big man who had gone out with Mr. Merridew was.

"Oh, the Mandrill!" said Kitty, laughing even before Louie had got out the word "big." "That's Mr. Jeffries. Isn't he a caution? But he only comes in the evenings."

She meant that Mr. Jeffries had not a pound a week on his own. Students who only came in the evenings were of a slightly inferior order to those who came during the day. 126

"I suppose he had his brown paper parcel with him?" Kitty said, with more mirth in her peering little eyes.

Louie remembered that Mr. Jeffries had carried a brown paper parcel. Kitty twittered.

"Bet you can't guess what was in it—that is, if you haven't heard it?"

She said "it" as if it had been a riddle or some sort of a joke. Louie admitted that she could not guess what had been in Mr. Jeffries' parcel.

"Good old brown paper parcel!" Kitty chuckled. "You'll get to know it by-and-by! You see," she explained, "he goes to Archie's for a bath. Isn't it killing?"

"I—I don't quite see what you mean," said Louie. She honestly did not.

"Why, for a bath—you know, a common or garden bath, with hot water. I peeped into it once (the parcel, I mean; for shame, you dreadful girl!) and it had a clean shirt and a pair of socks in it. I suppose he wraps those he takes off up when he's done."

Louie's eyes had opened very wide indeed. A man to have to ask another man for a bath! Well, that was something learned about London! A bath—a thing so necessary that its existence was assumed—how extremely amusing! She knew that entertaining word, "poor," but what was this other, this new and side-splitting word that meant that a man had to ask another man for a bath? She had never heard of anything so—so—there was no adjective that quite fitted the humour of it.

The next moment she had wasted an irony on Kitty.

"Hasn't he—a tidy bit?" she asked. 127

But it took far more than this to get through Kitty's hide. She gave another little laugh and drew her gloves more smoothly over her thin hands.

"Him? The Mandrill? (I always call him the Mandrill, my dear.) Not a penny to bless himself with; look at him!"

"Nor a permanency?" Louie asked.

"What, with those clothes? I ask you, now: it isn't a cold night to-night, is it? Well, why does he keep that heavy old coat on all the evening? Enough said, my dear. He works somewhere in the City, I believe—'something in the City'—sounds most prosperous, doesn't it? And Archie's awful kind to him, I think, but of course he is frightfully clever, and does help Archie with his work sometimes, so Archie gives him a bath (I don't mean what you mean, I mean lets him have one). Here's Evie. Are you coming along?"

But Louie, besides being tickled, smarted a little too. To have to beg for a bath—and then to have the gift made a matter of common knowledge and a joke!—

Well, if these people were different, differences, after all, were what she was here to see.

She turned to Mr. Weston.

What Mr. Weston wanted to say to her she could not guess; but he had hardly spoken twenty words before she was smiling at herself for not guessing. The examinations were to be held just before Christmas, and unless Louie could be ready for her Elementary by that time she would have a good many months to wait before she could enter for the examination again. What Mr. Weston had to propose was, in a word, that he should coach her privately.

She knew what that meant. It meant that he would come to Sutherland Place on Sundays and talk about Richenda. 128

Well, even talk about Richenda would make shorter that *dies non*.

"It really would be a great furtherance of your aims, Miss Causton," Weston said wistfully.

Louie smiled at the periphrasis, and then considered.

"It might be the best thing to do," she said; "but of course I should accept it only on one condition."

"May I venture to inquire what that condition is?" Weston inquired deferentially.

"That you let me pay you for it," said Louie promptly.

But Weston put up a peremptory hand. "Oh no—no, no, no—I should be ashamed after all your kindnesses——"

Louie laughed again. "Good gracious, what kindnesses?"

"Ah, you once shielded an individual very dear to me and took the blame upon yourself, Miss Causton——" His tone was reverential, his eyes did her homage. Louie had forgotten all about the box-room rebellion and Mrs. Lovenant-Smith. She laughed once more.

"Well, just as you like. But no pay, no coaching, that's all."

Weston sighed. No doubt his acquiescence cost him a pang. If he took money for giving lessons, lessons he must give, and the talk about Richenda must go.

"Do you dwell on the point with insistence?" he asked.

"Very much."

"I am far from denying that it would be of some assistance in the furnishing of our future nest, if I may use the expression——"

"Of course it would. So that's agreed?" 129

"So be it," said Weston.

Louie half expected him to add: "Amen."

She was in the habit of dispensing money a little largely, and for the present she could quite well afford to do this. For Chaff had done more than pay his debt. That very day she had had a letter from him, forwarded by the bank. He had paid one hundred pounds into her account, asking her to regard the extra twenty-five pounds as interest on his unceremonious borrowing. But she did not for a moment believe his cheerful tale that "things were all right again now"; poor old boy, ten to one he had borrowed pretty ruinously elsewhere in order to pay her. At all events, Weston should not give up his Sundays for nothing, and she might, after all, allow him an outpouring about Richenda and the future nest once in a while. It was only half-a-crown a week.

But as she left Weston she was thinking of something else that half-a-crown a week had power to buy. Half-a-crown a week would have bought this big shabby student a bath almost every day.

To have to carry a change of underclothing in a brown paper parcel to another man's place——

And to have that parcel peeped into——

How damnable—no, how funny, she meant!

In the light of her knowledge of this extraordinary economy Mr. Jeffries had to practise she felt—she didn't know why—almost shy in his presence the next time she saw him. She felt that she possessed something of his—namely, this knowledge—which she ought not to have possessed. She wondered whether he knew how he had been given away. Something about him almost suggested that he might. 130

Perhaps it was his mouth. It looked, except when he deliberately opened it, as if it might very well not have opened during the whole of the twenty-eight or twenty-nine years Louie guessed him to have had a mouth at all. The rest of his face, which would have been too large for any man less huge, was an unrelenting slab. It was in the mouth if anywhere that sensitiveness must be looked for. Certainly there was none in the eyes. These Louie found (it was on a Wednesday night that she noticed these things; she had seen him first on a Monday) remarkable. They were the eyes of a lion—clear amber, sherry-coloured. They were made more than ever to resemble the eyes of a lion by that tawny ulster he never removed, and she remembered Kitty's sinister and mirthful suggestion. Did his keeping on of that ulster mean something hardly less stark and laughable than the circumstance of the bath itself? (Louie felt that she was learning.) Then she noticed his hands. She always noticed hands. He stopped in passing to pick up a pen for her. The hand that returned it was not only a magnificent engine of sinew and bone and muscle, powerful and heroic; it was also (this was not so funny) exquisitely kept. Her own hand, pale and slender as the leaf of a willow by contrast with his, was not in its different way more perfect. He might cadge for a bath, but his hands he could look after himself for nothing. And that was true of his hair also. It was tawny, close-cut, and took the light as cleanly as a new silk-hat; hair-brushing was evidently cheap also. The man did what he could. She would have liked to hear his voice, but he handed her the pen in silence and passed on.

"Well, he looks forbidding," was her comment on him as the great church-door of his back disappeared into the typewriting-room, "and he has got too big a face and a rather frightening jaw; but he does shave it properly, and I don't see where the 'Mandrill' comes in—wretched little creature with her pound a week! And he is like a lion, with those eyes and that ulster——" 131

And merely because he seemed to be a person to be scored off and given meanly away, she was already prepared, had she been challenged, to vow that he was handsome—in his heavy and unhumorous way. As a matter of fact, if Roy Lovenant-Smith resembled the little terra-cotta head

in the Tanagra Gallery of the Museum, this Mr. Jeffries suggested something from the Assyrian Gallery downstairs—something in black basalt, that might carry the doorway of a temple on its head. In any case, with the ulster, the eyes, and the silky tawny hair, he was as like a lion as needs be.

When she had seen him twice only she took it upon herself to snub young Merridew on his behalf.

She and Kitty were leaving the School at four o'clock on the Thursday afternoon when the son of the fancy stationer joined them, and, taking it quite for granted that his tidy bit and his tennis-lawn made him as desirable to Louie as they evidently exalted him in Kitty's eyes, walked westwards along Holborn with them. He wore a new red waistcoat with brass buttons, and perhaps it was in order to live up to his splendour that he made Louie an offer which she curtly declined. They were passing a confectioner's shop; perhaps he noticed—for he seemed a sharp enough little bounder—Louie's glance at the window; he turned to her.

"Like some chocs?" he said.

Had Louie not already detested him, this would have been quite enough. Priddy would have had less appalling manners. As it happened, she would have liked some chocolates; lately she had craved for chocolates as much as she had hated the smell of tobacco; but she wanted no chocolates of this young man's buying. 132

"No, thank you," she replied; and presently she contrived to put Kitty (the straight-backed Kitty whom a man accompanied) between Mr. Merridew and herself.

She had the outside berth of the pavement, and she was wondering whether she would not cross the road and hop on a bus, leaving Kitty and the heir to the tennis-lawn together, when something Kitty said detained her. It was something about Mr. Jeffries. Hitherto Louie had hardly been listening.

"—oh, Jeff!" Merridew was saying. "He'll have to go till we come back. Anyway I shall save half-a-cake of soap."

"There's such a lot *of* him," Kitty giggled. "How big's your bath?"

"Well, he's an awfully useful coach for the Method exam., I will say that for him; so we'll call it a fair swap. You know Evie's aunt, don't you?"

"No."

"Thought you did. Good old Aunt Angela! (She always gets ratty when I call her that.) I didn't know she was an old friend of the pater's till we saw 'em at the Zoo that Sunday. So that's why they're coming."

"Oh, perhaps, perhaps not," said Kitty archly. "Perhaps it isn't the aunt they want to see——"

A passer-by elbowed Louie off the pavement; all she caught of what followed was Kitty's laugh.

"So that accounts for the new blouse! You never think of asking *me* down to Guildford, Archie!" she said reproachfully. 133

"You must get a chaperon," Archie replied gallantly; "can't be did without, Kitt-oh. The mater don't allow running after yours truly."

Then of another light passage Louie heard only the concluding laugh.

"Well, what of it?" Archie was saying knowingly; and Louie heard something else about apron-strings. "Pale blue baby ribbon ones, eh what?" Archie added, with a grin.

"Archie!" Kitty reproved him.

"Oh, come off it!" replied the fancy stationer's son. "As if a fellow hadn't eyes! If you girls *will* wear pneumonia blouses——"

"Archie, you're dreadful!" said Kitty, deliciously shocked.

"Well, it's a tannersworth at the Holborn Public Baths for Jeff next week-end——"

Here Louie interposed. Even amusement can be too rich. "Good-bye," she said, "there's my bus."

She heard Kitty call after her something about the penny stage, but by that time she was half-way across the road.

Brass-buttoned little beast!

She got on her bus.

But a quarter of a mile farther on she descended from it again. She wanted to buy chocolates for herself. She bought them, walked to the Marble Arch, and there turned into the Park. She ate the chocolates as she walked.

Little animal! He appeared to keep the whole School posted about Mr. Jeffries' personal habits. He could not go down to his home for the week-end, taking the Polly Ross girl and her aunt with him apparently, but Mr. Jeffries and half-a-cake of soap must be dragged in. And that pathetic, pathetic care the man took of his hair and hands! For all that, as she strode along, crunching her 134

chocolates, she became almost angry with him too. Was soap so frightfully dear, and was there no water anywhere but at Mr. Merridew's rooms? She could not understand a man who had any sensitiveness at all suffering his mind to be turned over and inspected and thumb-marked by these people in this way.

Still, she must not forget that these things were diverting.

There was no class that night: Louie forced herself to apply herself to her book-keeping until half-past nine, and then went to bed. That, as has been said, was on a Thursday. On the following evening, feeling indisposed to work, she moved about the School, amusing herself to her heart's content. She was getting adept in the sport of it. She bandied back to Kitty Windus, with whom she found herself in talk, half-a-score of her own expressions: "Beg yours," "Granted," "As the poet says," and the like; and she all but openly stalked Mr. Mackie for the sake of the pearls that rippled from his lips. If Mr. Mackie had offered to take her for a walk or to a shilling hop at the Holborn Town Hall on the next blank evening, Lord Moone's niece, who must allow no chance of amusement to slip her, would have let him. Indeed, she was in two minds whether or not to go to this last place of entertainment alone.

It was not for another week that her amusement at the School in general and at Mr. Jeffries in particular became almost painfully ecstatic. 135

III

On that Friday afternoon she did not go home as usual to Sutherland Place to tea. She went instead to the tea-shop across the street the waitresses of which seemed to crowd upon her as if the width of Holborn did not exist. As she sat down at her little marble table she glanced involuntarily across to the windows of the Business School and for a moment dropped the mask to herself. "Dingy place!" she thought; "well, we're a dingy crew inside it." Then, after a long, long walk down Chancery Lane and along the Embankment almost as far as the ship-breakers' yard at Millbank, she returned to evening class.

It was the evening before the day when Polly Ross—she begged her pardon, Miss Evie Soames—was to go with her aunt to the house with the tennis-lawn at Guildford. Young Merridew was not at the School that evening; indeed, he had only been once in the evening all the week, and then, Louie had thought (dropping the mask for another moment) he had better have stopped away. In a word, she had not been sure that he had been entirely sober. But perhaps in that she had been wrong. It didn't matter. She set a wide difference between the gaieties of the sons of fancy stationers with a tidy bit coming in and such diversions as that to which her stepfather had once taken her, pigtail and all. Besides, if people didn't drink liquor she supposed her father would not be able to sell it.

On two occasions already during the past week that mask of her amusement had not so much fallen off as been twitched off before she herself had been aware. Very remarkably, both times the big leonine student, Mr. Jeffries, had been the twitcher. In both cases the actual incident had 136
been the same—a glance, nothing more. But those two glances had set Louie very curiously indeed waiting to see whether a third surprise of the same funny kind would follow them.

The glances had been given by Mr. Jeffries, and they had been directed towards the Soames girl. There had seemed to Louie to be an extraordinary unfitness about them. Had the red-waistcoated boy stolen those glances Louie would have thought no more about it; he and Polly Ross were pretty much a pair; but they had surprised her coming from the other. Louie had been sure that on the first occasion Mr. Jeffries had fancied himself to be unobserved, for he had looked stealthily round about him, had waited for a moment, and then, moving his eyes only, had given that long, slow, daring, masterful look. This had been on the previous Monday evening, in the general room. A few minutes later Mr. Jeffries had gathered up his papers and had stridden past Evie Soames as if he had been unaware of her existence.

Even had something very similar not occurred again on the Wednesday evening, Louie would hardly have forgotten that look; but it had been repeated. But this time, finding Louie's eyes on him, he had seemed to guard himself, to busy himself quite fussily with his papers, and a little to overdo his sudden affectation of indifference. Louie admitted that it would be at her own risk that she put any interpretation that was not amusing on these trifles; but about the glances, their surreptitiousness and the man's deliberate attempt at concealment, there had been no doubt whatever. Polly herself, Louie had to admit, had been quite unconscious of either look. To all appearances, she had been thinking of nothing but of the new novelette in the Pansy Library, or 137
else wondering whether the new pair of shoes she was to go down to Guildford in would come home in time.

On that Friday evening Louie again found herself a little less inclined for amusement than she knew to be good for her. She supposed she ought to work, for if book-keeping and typewriting and so forth were to be her living they might just as well be taken seriously; but she preferred to work where gossip was going on. So she began the evening in one of the days in the **E** of reference books, where Miss Windus and the thick-lipped Miss Levey were sitting on the short library-ladder, whispering and tittering. Louie opened one of the windows, for she found the place airless, and then idled towards her two fellow-students.

She had gathered that Miss Levey did not like her. Miriam Levey was far less stupid than Kitty

Windus, and it was not safe to hand her *clichés* back to her. Indeed, she had given Louie a far too intelligent look when Louie had gratified this hunger for humour of hers at the unconscious Kitty's expense; and Louie had told herself that it might be as well to be a little more careful. They looked up as Louie joined them, but did not exclude her from their talk.

"I *vill* find out who she is!" Miss Levey was saying—her W's did sometimes become V's. "I shall plague him till I do!"

"He won't tell you, my dear—not if he wouldn't tell Archie."

"But did Archie actually say 'engaged'?"

"Well, a person's either engaged or not, I suppose."

"Oh no, my dear, not by long chalks! Vy, you might as well say that Archie and Evie are either 138
engaged or not!"

"Well, they aren't—yet."

"'Yet'—there you are!"

"Well, I'll bet they aren't, even after this week-end. Why, they're no age! *I* don't believe in getting yourself engaged and done for before you've had a good look round!" Kitty tossed her head.

"Vill you bet they aren't engaged in three months?" said Miriam Levey.

No, Kitty wouldn't bet that. She returned to the original subject, whatever that had been.

"It's all very well to say you'll find out, Miriam, but—how?"

Miss Levey tittered, and then suddenly said: "Ssss—I'll show you now! Just you watch me——"

She slipped noiselessly round to the cords of the window Louie had opened a few moments before.

No doubt her sharp eyes had seen Mr. Jeffries approach. She gave him a helpless look, and he took the cords from her fumbling hands and closed the window for her. It was the more cleverly done that she detained Mr. Jeffries and managed to get closed the window which Louie wanted open at one and the same time. She turned her prominent brown eyes in gratitude to Mr. Jeffries.

"Oh, thank you so much! You see, I've got rather a cold, and I'm going to a dance and don't vant to make it any vorse," she explained. "You don't dance, do you, Mr. Jeffries?"

But Mr. Jeffries merely replied "No," and turned away at once. Miss Levey turned to Kitty again.

"He needn't think he's put me off!" she said. "I *vill* find out! I shall offer him some tickets now, for 139
self and lady. And I bet if she dances I'll make him buy them!"

Kitty tossed her head. "*I* should expect the gentleman *I* was engaged to to take *me* to dances," she said.

"But Archie didn't say 'engaged.' Just after somebody, I should say—and don't I just vish her joy!"

"It's evidently nobody at the School," mused Kitty Windus. "Archie was almost certain about that."

"Vell, it isn't *me*, if you're thinking of suspecting me!" said Miss Levey merrily. "*I* vouldn't touch him with the end of a long pole."

"Chance is a fine thing, my dear," remarked Miss Windus.

"Opportunity's another." (This reply, Louie had noted, was *de rigueur*.)

"I expect she types or something at his place in the City."

"She might be in an A.B.C. shop—no, a Lockhart's."

"Or a barmaid," Kitty hinted.

"Or his vashervoman."

"Oh, I expect he washes his own shirts."

"Perhaps he'll vash her blouses, too, whoever she is."

They both laughed.

Louie, her mask once more a little out of place, turned suddenly away.

Little as she had been inclined to work, she was now, somehow or other, not much more inclined for amusement. She wandered into the shorthand dictation class, but in a few minutes came out again. Then she walked into the lecture-room, where some example or other had been left chalked up on the big blackboard from the last lesson. Thence she went into the typewriting-room, and back to the lecture-room again. Finally she got from the "library"—the little back room 140
where the files and presses and gelatine copiers and a few books were kept—a number of old examination papers, and, finding a chair near the folding door that divided the lecture-room from

the general-room, sat down and began to turn them over.

But she thought more of the conversation she had just overheard than she did of the examination papers. It had meant, as far as she had been able to make it out, that Mr. Jeffries had told young Merridew that he was engaged, or hoped to be engaged, to somebody outside the school altogether. That sounded—odd. Of course if Mr. Jeffries said so, Mr. Jeffries ought to know; but it is a difficult matter to disbelieve your own eyes. She supposed she had no choice but to disbelieve them, but—but—there *were* those two glances he had given at the Polly Ross girl—whom, by the way, she must learn to call by her proper name, Miss Evie Soames.

Louie was perfectly certain that she had not been mistaken in the nature of those two glances. Her reason for certitude was quite unassailable. She had known what they meant for the simple reason that she had never received such looks from a man herself.

Suddenly she dropped this mask of fevered amusement entirely. As she had once sat on the stile between Rainham Parva and the sea, so Louie now sat by the folding door—relaxed, thinking of nothing, or, if of anything, certainly neither of her late resolute pose nor yet of study. Her mind was what she had determined it should not be if she could help it—an empty chamber for unknown devils to enter.

Students passed and repassed. Weston had been through several times, and twice Evie Soames had come and gone again. This so-much-talked-of Mr. Jeffries went into the library for a book and walked past with it again. He still wore that concealing ulster; the Soames girl had on a brown tailor-made and a cap of knitted white wool. Louie was hardly conscious that she noticed these things. She still sat, all slack and unbraced, with the examination papers on her knee. 141

All at once she came to herself. Why she should do so at that particular moment she did not know, but, doing so, she found herself completely awake again. To all intents and purposes she had come out of one of those naps which, lasting perhaps only a minute, have all the effect of a refreshing sleep. She could reassume her mask now. Evie Soames was talking to Weston by the blackboard; opposite her, a pale student called Richardson was copying down an exercise from a sheet on the wall; and she supposed Mr. Jeffries would be bringing his book back presently. Louie was as alive to her surroundings now as she had been oblivious to them a few moments before.

A minute later Mr. Jeffries, returning with his book, passed into the library. A few seconds later still Evie Soames had left Mr. Weston and had followed him.

"Now," thought Louie, "for a little more amusement."

The library had only one communicating door; its other door led only to a small room called the old ledger-room, a dusty cubby-hole, seldom entered, that had no outlet save the small pivoted window, high up, that gave on the head of the stairs. Mr. Jeffries and Miss Soames would have to come out by the same way they had entered, and Louie rather wanted to see them come out. It was no business of hers, but she had remembered those two glances and the conversation between Kitty Windus and Miriam Levey, and she had a perfect right to sit by the folding door and to use her eyes if she wished. She was now almost preternaturally awake. No jot of the jest, whatever it was, should escape her. 142

Evie came out first, after four or five minutes; but Louie was not interested in Evie. She was merely a dull tale: Louie wanted to see him.

Then, a moment later, he came.

But no amusement came with him. Instead, Louie knew not what sudden private ache stirred deep at her own heart. It was not a question of those two furtive, possessive glances now. Unmistakable enough those had been; you do not mistake the kind of glance for which you yourself have hungered when you see it given to another; but not only had Louie never seen—she had never, not even in her own rapt dreamings as a half-grown girl in her teens, thought it possible that a man's look at a woman could change his face as this man's face was changed now. It was irradiated, transfigured. He took no pains now to hide it. He could see clear down the room before him—could see (or so he evidently thought) any who saw him——

And since he did not see Louie by the folding door, Louie knew that in his former passings and repassings he could not have seen her either.

He disappeared. The Soames girl was waiting by the door, evidently for him. No doubt he was going to see her home. Probably she would have preferred the other, the little cad with the red waistcoat, but she had the lion——

He returned, with his hat on, and they left together.

But what had brought that sudden ache into Louie's breast? Mr. Jeffries was nothing to her. If his face shone, Louie's heart need not therefore ache. What ailed her? 143

Unmasked, as alive to things within herself now as she had just been to things outside herself, she sat, deeply wondering.

Against the wall at her left hand there stood a tall stationery cupboard. It had glazed doors, and the pale student called Richardson, coming up a moment ago to put his exercise-book back into its place, had left one of the doors open. The door moved on its hinges back into its place. With its motion there swung slowly into Louie's view the reflection of the grimy chandelier with its

three naked gas-jets.

Was it this that reminded her of the night when she had swept out of Mrs. Lovenant-Smith's French window with the yellow-shaded standard lamp mirrored in its pane?

It had been on that night——

Suddenly her eyes closed, as if closed eyes could have shut out a mental picture. Her lips trembled—voicelessly they shaped a name.

It was the name of Roy.

Hitherto she had hardly known what her feelings towards Roy really were. It had been in order to avoid asking herself that question, among others, that she had amused herself with Kitty Windus and welcomed the buffooneries of Mr. Mackie. But it presented itself to her startlingly now. Her own complete ignorance had just revealed a shining thing to her, the beautiful thing that had transformed Mr. Jeffries' face; now—handy-dandy—that very transformation threw her brutally back on her ignorance again. 144

She had thought she had sounded a mystery; had she, after all, *not* sounded any mystery, and was she to pay in labour and pain for nothing?

Her thoughts had flown back; they remained where they had flown. Good gracious! What an escapade! Without mercy for herself she examined it. What had really happened? Anything worth what it was about to cost?

The radiant look of another man at another woman answered her: No.

She had courted him—what a conquest! She had made him say she was pretty—what a victory! She had schemed, planned, ensured her kisses—what a triumph!... Why, she now asked herself for the first time, had she wanted to triumph? Why had she not seen sooner that what she had really wanted had been to be triumphed over? Triumph?—It came to her with a strange newness that women didn't triumph by triumphing. That man with the back like the church door, for example, who had just gone out with that pretty snippet——

Instantly, and with extraordinary resilience, her mind established a contrast.

No woman would have to cajole this shabby, lion-eyed man into admiration of her beauty. Rather she would have to save herself from his onslaught—and then, in her very flying, she would triumph. Louie had found a fool invincible; but this other, when he loved, would go down with the vehemence of his own assault. When Louie had refused to kiss Roy at their parting she had not known exactly why she had done so: she had obeyed an instinct; a chapter had been closed, and had had to be marked as definitely closed; her heart had known no rancour against him. But now! —she might just as well have kissed him. Now, in this strange place, two strange people—or rather one, for the girl mattered nothing—had in a moment, and infinitely, enlarged her sense of what, at any rate to a man, love might mean. In the light of that enlargement any kiss she could have given to Roy would have meant nothing—nothing, nothing. Poor Roy, whom she had had to woo! This other would do his own wooing. Why, he was doing it now—— 145

Then a startling recollection caused Louie to sit suddenly upright. This lion, who had given those looks at that girl—this shabby giant, whose face she had just seen enheavened out of all knowledge—had told young Merridew, who had told Kitty Windus and Miriam Levey, that his heart was set on somebody outside this poky little Business School altogether!

Involuntarily Louie drew a long breath of amazement.

He had told them that!

Then Louie became matter-of-fact. There was one thing and one thing only to be said. If Mr. Jeffries had told him that, Mr. Jeffries had—lied.

She turned it over again—she found no flaw in it.

Yes, if he had said that, he had lied.

Louie pondered. The result of her pondering was that she said slowly to herself: "Ah—this is going to be more than amusing—unless I'm mistaken it might even become dramatic."

Up to the moment of this astonishing discovery—for Louie knew that she had made a discovery—Mr. Jeffries had been to her a phenomenon, different from Mr. Mackie and Kitty Windus, but not to be observed very differently; now in a twink she placed him in quite another category. Or, if she still lacked a category in which to place him, she certainly removed him for ever from the other. He had called suddenly on her profounder attention, and, as if he had struck upon a rock, the waters of it gushed forth. Apparently to others he was a butt, a jest, a pathetic figure; he was not that to Louie Causton now. They had said, Kitty and the Jewess, that Evie Soames and the red-waistcoated boy, off to Guildford together to-morrow, would before long be engaged to be married; but Mr. Jeffries, the third person in the commonest of dramas, and Mr. Jeffries, the introducer into that drama of a preposterous, impossible fourth actor, whose name Miriam Levey was resolved to know, were not one and the same man. Louie sat astounded again at his lie. It struck her as really in its way stupendous. Others thought he was below his fellows in this shabby little hutch of a Business School; not so Louie now! She saw those clear yellow eyes again. Ruses 146

and machinations lived in them. A butt, with his brown-paper parcel? A pathetic figure, with his cadged baths? No—good gracious, no! The faces of butts and pathetic figures were rather less capable of irradiation. This man's kind made great somethings—great men, great saints, great lovers—if it came to the worst great criminals. Had she, Louie, been that jaunty young man in the red waistcoat, she would have chosen for a rival and enemy anybody she had ever seen rather than this needy, gigantic Mr. Jeffries, who made this barefaced attempt to throw dust into people's eyes by means of apocryphal women he was "after" elsewhere.

And he helped this youngster he must hate with his studies—cadged on his probably-to-be-successful rival for a bath. 147

He was masked too, then.

Yes, at this dingy School in Holborn Louie had found something even more interesting than amusement.

IV

§*a*

Louie had not yet allowed herself much time for fear of what was to happen to herself physically; she had amused herself too heartily. She bought chocolates and hated the smell of tobacco; and so far that was all. What hung over her was as inevitable as Death, and for that reason was, like Death, to be kept at arm's-length as long as possible.

But she had already seen enough of Richenda's sister to be aware that in all probability her stay in Sutherland Place would not be a long one. Mrs. Leggat was formally kind, to Lord Moone's niece rather than to herself; but for the rest an armed neutrality seemed to exist between the two women. The Leggats were childless, and for that reason the less likely to be charitable. Louie had, in fact, found the social layer that is bounded on the one hand by the wickedness of pugilists and on the other by the scapes of young gentlemen about to enter the army. Within these limits Virtue reigned—not always harshly, always consciously. Not the wives of the Cæsars (it seemed to Louie) were above suspicion, but the Mrs. Leggats; not the saints, who confessed that they were tempted, but the Westons, who did not know of temptation's existence. It was as if some 148
unseen, august Mrs. Lovenant-Smith had decreed that landladies and teachers in business schools did not do these things. And they did not.

Louie went to the house of Richenda's father, the bookseller—once. She had no wish to go again. As Richenda had described him there had been something tragic about him; to Louie he had appeared merely as a grey-bearded, rheumatic, complaining old man, a picture of pathos without dignity. And those six other Richendas, of various ages, struck her as horribly superfluous. She wanted Life's colour, not its greyness; she greatly preferred the garnish, incredible Mackie.

The weeks passed. Weston came regularly on Sunday mornings, and on Sunday afternoons she took long walks. On the nights when there was no class she rode on buses, along Oxford Street, down Regent Street to the Circus, and back by Park Lane to the Marble Arch and Notting Hill Gate again; or sometimes she went Paddington way, up the Harrow Road and out and back through Kilburn. She began to know something of the streets of London. Her health was far better in London than it had been at Rainham Parva. It was perfect. She still feared nothing.

The Christmas Examinations drew within sight, and hand in hand with the preparation for them another and a more lightsome preoccupation engaged the School. This was the Christmas Social with which the last term of the year always closed. An Executive had been formed; on it Louie's name appeared; and it met frequently at the close of afternoon school. One of the younger students was sent across to the teashop over the way for scones and cake; a kettle was set on the 149
general-room fire; and the social was discussed over tea.

Mr. Mackie was the life and soul of these meetings. He was especially strong on the subject of whether evening-dress was to be obligatory, permissible or debarred. He declared himself at one of the earlier meetings as out and out for fancy dress, but was outvoted.

"See me as a Woodbine, girls, beg pardon, miss-cue, a Columbine, I mean, nearly cold with the kilt, kilt with the cold, I should say, sixpence in the box for the opera-glasses, Gerald, but don't ogle me while mother's in the wings, wishing she was twenty-one again—good old mother—

> "'Here's to the happiest hours of my life,
> Spent in the arms of another man's wife—
> My Mo-the-rr!'"

(The shake on the long note produced by a rapid play of Mr. Mackie's fingers on Mr. Mackie's Adam's apple.) "Thought I'd have to backpedal, didn't you, Miss Causton? Nay, fear not, fair damsel, the intentions of Ferdinando are honourable, as long as you watch him, pip-pip, phee-ooo!" (The shrill whistle behind the handkerchief closed the strophe.)

But this was rushing matters. Kitty Windus spoke, no doubt on behalf of the students who hadn't a pound a week on their own.

"Fancy dress would keep a good many away," she said. "I should love it, but it really is an expense, you know."

"Weston can buy a penny bottle of gum and come as a foreign stamp."

"Do be serious, Mr. Mackie, now! We want the social to be for everybody here——" 150

"*And* their friends," Miss Levey interpolated, with a look of private understanding at Kitty Windus. There was a short interlude between the two women.

"You *won't* find out, Miriam!"

"I *vill*!"

"Did you offer him tickets for the Holborn?"

"Yes; but he vouldn't buy them."

"Doesn't Mrs. J. as-is-to-be dance?"

"I don't know. He vouldn't buy the tickets."

"I'll bet you another half-crown you don't get him there, let alone her!"

"Done vith you, Kitty Vindus!" cried Miss Levey excitedly.

Here Mr. Mackie interposed. "Who's that? Jeffries? He can come in his ulster as Boaz—*heu*, how Ruthless! (Beshrew me, but have I not a pretty wit?)"

"He's got that new brown suit to come in—or did he get it second-hand, Archie?" asked Kitty.

"New," quoth Archie authoritatively. "Allworthy's, in Cheapside. Two ten."

"I nearly died when he turned up without that old ulster!"

"Vasn't it screaming?" simpered Miss Levey. "No, don't, Archie!" (Young Merridew was pulling out the frill of her jabot.)

"Do tell us exactly what he said when you congratulated him on his engagement, Evie!" said Kitty Windus, turning to Evie Soames.

The girl coloured a little. In common fairness Louie had to acquit her of full participation in the joke of Mr. Jeffries and his unknown *fiancée*. Louie had learned that it had been in order to congratulate Mr. Jeffries on this supposed engagement that she had followed Mr. Jeffries into the 151
library on that Friday evening before her departure for the week-end to Guildford. She thought little more of her on that account. In being too ready with apologies and congratulations Evie Soames merely showed the vulgarity of the rest of the place.

"No, do let's get on with business," Kitty Windus broke in. "I vote for ordinary dress."

"Yes, ordinary dress," came the chorus.

"Vith vite gloves, of course," said Miss Levey.

"Of course."

"Vot do you say, Miss Causton?"

"White gloves, of course," said Louie, with her demurest look. "And flowers in their buttonholes."

"Some gentlemen don't like to vear flowers," said Miriam Levey suspiciously.

"Aha, doesn't he?" from Mr. Mackie. "*I* saw you at the Holborn, Miss Levey—naughty, naughty ——"

"Oh, I don't mean very big ones," said Louie, sipping her tea.

And the discussion went on, and meeting followed meeting; but the examination was to take place before the social.

The only fear Louie had for her Elementary was whether it would be worth very much when she had got it. She supposed that as an earnest preparation for the struggle of life this place was not quite such a fraud as Chesson's, but that struggle could hardly be as fierce as Richenda Earle had said if this Elementary took her very far. Indeed she had wondered more than once lately, especially since she had ceased to amuse herself quite so desperately, whether it was likely that typewriting and book-keeping were to be her destiny after all. She supposed they were, but she 152
couldn't quite realise it. But she was fully prepared, and hoped Mr. Jeffries was as sure of his Honours paper as she was of her simple Pass.

For she had gathered that success in the coming examination was of importance to Mr. Jeffries. She did not know the nature of his studies; later she surmised that those had been only loosely linked to the ordinary school curriculum, and that while for his Certificate's sake he must acquire all that text-books could tell him, his real broodings had been over matters that are antecedent to text-books. That was probably the difference between him and Mr. Weston. Mr. Weston was said to be clever, but his cleverness ended at the point where real inquiry began. More than this Louie did not know. You cannot, after all, ask the pioneer what he goes forth for to see. He goes forth to

see whatever there may be to be seen.

The weeks that had intervened since that evening when Louie had seen that wonderful radiance of his face had done nothing to alter her conviction that if there was a dark horse in that Holborn stable at all the name of that horse was Mr. Jeffries.

As it happened, Mr. Jeffries was almost the first person she encountered when, on the Friday morning of the examination, she entered the School at half-past ten. He wore the new brown suit that had been remarked on at the meetings of the Executive of the social, and he was looking with curiosity about him. They had made quite extensive preparations for the examination. The whole place had been divided into compartments with hired yellow-painted screens, and screens also barricaded the **E** of reference-books near the bay window of the general-room. New pens 153
and new blotting-paper lay on the desks, and the little porcelain inkwells had been newly filled. Then it occurred to Louie that it was more than likely that Mr. Jeffries had never been in the place in the daytime before. He must have got the day off from that "somewhere in the City" that Kitty Windus had said sounded so prosperous. His tawny hair was as flat and silky as ever, and his chin as cleanly shaved. He passed her with a curt bow and continued his inspection of the place. The candidates stood talking in groups, waiting for eleven o'clock.

"Have you discovered your—er—appointed place, Miss Causton?" said Weston, coming up to Louie. "Good, good! I must now take my departure. Members of the Staff are not permitted to remain on the premises during the hours devoted to the examination. I wish you—er—good luck."

He seemed to change his mind about saying "a happy issue from all your afflictions."

By eleven o'clock Louie was seated in her little screen-enclosed compartment. A sort of hired mourner read a formal caution to the candidates. She noticed that it lacked the *largior ether* of the third person indicative, being, indeed, in the second person imperative; and then she drew her paper to her.

Quiet fell on the examination-rooms.

She found her papers no more difficult than she had anticipated. On one point only, a matter of indenting in actual practice, was she a little in doubt, and a minute in the old ledger-room at lunch-time would tell her whether her answer had been right or wrong. She read over again what she had written; it seemed, with the possible exception of that single point, all right; and she tilted her chair, put her hands behind her head, and leaned back. The candidates had been 154
warned that they must bring lunch with them. It was half-an-hour from lunch-time yet.

Her place was by the folding door of the general-room. From it she could see nothing save the stationery cupboard on her left, and, beyond it, the next screen-enclosed compartment. She was wondering who was in it when a foot moved beneath the yellow screen. It was the foot of Mr. Jeffries. Louie hoped that he was getting on well, and then dismissed him from her thoughts. She began to wonder about the practical usefulness of the examination again.

Doubtless it was well enough in its way, but less than ever could she persuade herself that this kind of thing was to be her destiny. There were too many other likelihoods—not to speak of the one certainly so huge that she had sometimes been actually in danger of leaving it out of the account altogether. Idly she counted them. First, there was the certainty.... Next, she would probably be leaving Sutherland Place soon, to go—where? She did not know. At the price of submission to Uncle Augustus she could go back home; or Chaff would have her looked after; but both these courses were rather out of the question. They were out of the question because lately something else had been more and more in her thoughts—her unknown father. That father might, for all she knew, be the bugbear her mother had always made him out to be; but on the other hand he might not. She knew her mother, and the more she thought of it the more she gave her father the benefit of an increasing number of doubts. Until she should have seen him it was now no more than fair that she should do so. Moreover, she could see him at any time without his 155
being any the wiser of the—inspection. Chaff knew where he was; Chaff, who was always fetching or taking her somewhere, would take her there also. She was resolved to go sooner or later, and later might be—who knew?—too late.

For at last she had admitted a dread.

In any case, her destiny was quite as likely to be determined by a visit to that public-house up the Thames as by writing, in this stuffy Holborn third floor, answers to ridiculous questions about *pro forma* invoices and bills of lading.

She was still turning these things over in her mind when the bell rang for the close of the first part of the examination.

She ate her lunch in the company of Kitty Windus and Miss Levey, and then the three women passed out on to the staircase and sat down half-way down the stairs. But the men had flocked to the staircase for their noxious smoking, and Louie re-entered the general-room again. Then she remembered the doubtful point in her paper and walked to the library. She passed through it into the old ledger-room. Any old ledger would settle the point on which she was not quite sure.

The room was almost dark, but Louie knew where the musty old books were. She put out her hand to the nearest of them. But suddenly she withdrew her hand. The high window that gave on the head of the stairs afforded no more than a glimmer of light, but Louie thought she had seen something move. She peered into the twilight, "Is anybody there?" she said, but she had no

answer.

But the room was occupied. The next moment she had seen and fled. 156

Her irregular lips were pursed as she came out into the light again. There was a confusion, too, in her eyes, probably as much as there had been in the eyes of the two she had come upon in there. They must have seen her come in, and have realised that their only chance of escaping detection lay in keeping perfectly still.

Polly Ross, cheek to cheek with that horrid little bounder!

There was no question now of whom the girl preferred.

Louie, wondering what right she had to do so, felt nevertheless a little sick.

But the next moment her fastidiousness had vanished. The door that led to the stairs had opened; Mr. Mackie's voice sounded loud for a moment on the landing; and then Mr. Jeffries lurched in, stumbled, and almost ran to his compartment between the yellow screens.

How he too knew what was going on in the old ledger-room, Louie could not guess; but she knew that he did know.

She walked slowly to her own place and sat down.

A few minutes later the bell for the second half of the examination rang, and a new paper was put before Louie. But she neither glanced at it nor yet heard the voice of the hired mourner repeating his caution. She sat with her chin in her hands, looking straight before her. She was wondering what was taking place behind the yellow screen beyond the stationery cupboard. Amusement was hardly the word for that.

For she had seen Mr. Jeffries' face as he had stumbled in. She sought words for the expression that had been upon it. Lost—despairing—devilish—— 157

There was not much doubt about who *he* was in love with either.

Devilish, despairing, lost——

"Poor—soul!" she thought compassionately....

She wondered why she should be so unaccountably nervous. She was nervous. She even jumped a little when somebody on the other side of the folding door allowed a pen to fall to the floor. She could see the feet beneath the lower edge of the screen in front of her; they did not move; the examination quietness had fallen on the place again, and the very quietness grew on her. Strong drama, if not tragedy outright, was being enacted behind those half-inch yellow boards beyond the stationery cupboard, but the quietness continued. It was such a quietness as she had read of in tales when, somebody's ears being sharpened for an expected scream, their eyes had not at first noticed the little dark rivulet of blood trickling slowly across the floor. Involuntarily her eyes went to the yellow screen.

But rubbish; this was morbid.

Morbid or not, however, her lips almost shaped the words, slowly and deliberately: that boy with the red waistcoat would do well to be careful. He would do especially well to be careful if, after this, after the glare on the other's face, he should still have help offered him with his studies or be asked for a bath. For something would happen then. Eggshells such as he did not come into collision with bronze without something happening. And if anything not easily to be accounted for did happen to that odious little whippersnapper, nothing would ever persuade Louie that she did not know a likely quarter in which to look for the reason. 158

Blind, devilish despair!

And all for an empty-headed little thing who could have been found in her dozens behind twenty shop counters not a quarter of a mile away! What on earth, what on, or under, or above the earth, could this brooding, clever, gigantic, laughed-at creature want with such a doll? Why could he not leave her in her proper place—cheek by cheek with the little bounder of her choice in that smelly, unlighted old ledger-room? The man must be blind, or a fool.

Then a sort of lethargy took Louie. Suddenly she cared for nothing. Let the fancy-stationer's cub take his risks; let the other eat his heart out if he would; it was no business of hers. Nor was that absurd table of questions before her any business of hers. Kitty Windus might answer that sort of thing; Mackie might answer it; but the Scarisbricks were not Kittys, with her "part-independency," not Mackies, to stuff their heads and ink their fingers like this for their "permanencies." She did not know now why she had ever come to the place, and she wanted no more of it. What she was going to do she did not know. She did know, however, that she was not going to answer that silly paper.

So, by-and-by, she allowed the paper to be collected again, as blank as when it had been placed before her.

She came upon the perverse Mr. Jeffries once more before she left. He almost ran her down bodily as they met in the doorway of the typewriting-room. But this time she did not look at his face. With a swift intaking of her breath she fell back to save herself. She did not hear whether

he apologised or not; in one moment, without premeditation, her whole being had become constrained to a new, protective, instinctive attitude. 159

Slowly and thoughtfully she left the School.

She alone of the students was unsurprised to hear, four or five days later, that Mr. Jeffries, who had passed with distinction in the first part of his paper, had, like herself, failed in the second part.

§*b*

For the examination the rooms had been cut up with screens; for the breaking-up social they were cleared of everything that could be stowed away into dark corners. Never was such a hoisting and calling as those with which the hired piano was got up the three flights of stairs. Most of it came from Mr. Mackie, turned for the nonce into a shabash-wallah.

"Mind her funnybone—all together—up with her! Oh, pursue me, wenches, I've got my muscle up, first time since the second housemaid ran away with the dustman! Don't tickle her parson's nose, Archi-bald, or she'll sneeze when I sing, key in the usual place—and mind the stair above the top, it isn't there. This way—excuse my shirt-sleeves, Miss Windus, I'm in mourning."

And so the piano was trundled to its place in the corner by the big blackboard.

Mr. Mackie was of service, too, in the French-chalking of the floor, for the men hauled him about by the arms and legs on a piece of sacking in order to give it its final polish for dancing. Half the students, male and female, helped to wind the blackened old brackets and chandeliers with red and green tissue paper, to set evergreens on the tops of the cupboards, and to affix the trophies 160
of little Christmas tree flags on the cabbagey old walls; and Louie helped with the refreshments. Three women had been got in, one to make coffee and the others to preside in the cloakrooms, and Miss Levey had won half-a-crown from Kitty Windus.

For Mr. Jeffries was coming to the party after all. More, it had been Louie herself who had asked him, though it had been Miss Levey's cunning that had made her do so. On no grounds at all save that it appeared to annoy, the Jewess had once or twice twitted Louie that Mr. Jeffries favoured *her* and, when Mr. Jeffries had declined her own invitation, had nudged Louie. "*You* ask him, and see whether he doesn't come!" the nudge had meant. Louie entered into no contest with Miss Levey. She had turned at once to Mr. Jeffries and repeated the invitation. He had accepted it.

Louie doubted her own wisdom in going to that social at all. Even when she had reached Sutherland Place and spread out her frocks on her bed she still doubted. But suddenly she gave a short laugh. Of course she was going! It was her first "social," and it might be her last; she was going, and she was going to wear the oyster-grey satin that, ever since she had had it, had always seemed to "live" so on her shoulders.

She declined Mrs. Leggat's help in getting into it; if Mrs. Leggat would be so good as to get her a hansom instead——Mrs. Leggat went out. The oyster-grey was one of the oldest of her frocks; Louie knew every stitch of it; and she smiled as she thought that for that very reason she would have chosen it had she deliberately intended to make a conquest. She surveyed herself in it in the 161
tilted glass. Yes, she thought she would do.

"It's your last time on, poor old rag," she muttered.

She heard the pulling up of the hansom; she put on a light shawl and descended; and Mrs. Leggat lingered in the doorway as she drove off.

They had set candles on the floors of the landings of the Holborn stairs, but they guttered in the draughts, and showed little but the feet of those who ascended. Louie followed a pair of orange silk-stockinged ankles and a trammel of orange petticoats (she didn't know whose) up the stairs, and entered the general-room. The library had been converted into a ladies' cloakroom, with the old ledger-room as an annexe; and in this last room Evie Soames, with an elaborate running of pink ribbons beneath the openwork of her cream net blouse, was putting on her slippers. She only showed Louie the top of her dark head; in this and other ways she had displayed reserve since the lunch interval of the examination day. A woman with a pair of very chapped hands and a very clean apron took Louie's shawl; and Louie, first glancing at her hair over the powdered shoulders of the person in orange, went into the double room that had been prepared for dancing.

Students and their friends had turned up in their best bibs and tuckers. Most of the men wore swallow-tailed coats; one of the exceptions was Mr. Jeffries in his brown jacket-suit. He was talking to Miss Levey, or rather Miss Levey was gasping to him; she had just given him, or rather hung upon his wrist, one of the violet-written cards, printed from the gelatine-copier, which served as programmes. Weston wore a tightly fitting old frock-coat, which Mr. Mackie 162
humorously likened to the overcoat of sausage that had spent the night in the coal-hole. Archie Merridew had a white waistcoat. All the men stroked the wrinkles out of their white gloves without ceasing. The women, to the reflective eye, had lost little by the foregoing of out-and-out evening-dress. There was an "I could an' if I would" about their long sleeves and high necks. Kitty Windus, in her blue foulard, with a cutlet-frill about her thin neck, graciously consented to the level of those who had not a pound a week on their own; Miriam Levey, in a maroon pinafore-

frock with broad braces over her shoulders, instantly put every simple blouse in the room at its ease. One frock only flouted the modest agreement to which the executive had come; this was the orange satin one which Louie had followed upstairs. It partially clothed a friend of Mr. Mackie's. Louie heard the words in which Mr. Mackie introduced young Merridew to its wearer.

"Mr. Merridew, Miss Dulcie Levine, Miss Levine, Mr. Merridew, two of the best, seasonable weather for the time of the year, ain't it, what? Permit me, Dulcibella, a bit of fluff" (here Mr. Mackie cast aside the bit of fluff, if there was one, which he had taken from Miss Dulcie's shoulder, and represented the noise of its falling by a loud stamp on the floor). "Ought to be dancing soon; what time is it by your clocks, Dulcie? *I* saw them as you got out of the Black Maria, the cab, I mean—*heu*, desist, Mr. Mackie, you wag!" (Mr. Mackie smacked his own wrist in reproof of himself.) "Why am I not in me usual spirits, gin cold, to-night, Dulcinea? 'Tis thy fatal beauty has undone me; what ho, a needle and threat, O fairest of thy socks, sex I should say.... 163
Ay, she dances, Archibald, but not with thee, base varlet; she dances at the Theatre hight Alcazar, nigh unto ye Square called Leicester."

Louie heard Kitty Windus whisper to Evie Soames that Mr. Mackie was going to be splendid to-night; but her approval did not extend to Mr. Mackie's friend, who was already too splendid. Kitty's head was held so high when Miss Levine passed that she appeared to be looking at her with her nostrils. With her eyes she saw only the orange creature's back. This was a rather handsome **V**, and that did not improve matters. Kitty whispered behind her fan about "some people." Miss Dulcie used Kitty as a quizzing-glass for the inspection of whoever happened to be behind her.

Mr. Jeffries stood with his back against the thrown-back folding door. He did not dance, but he had not at all the air of a wet blanket; on the contrary, his face wore a quite lively smile. He was smiling at the red and green tissue paper that enswathed the central chandelier. Louie saw Evie Soames pass him; his eyes rested on her for a moment, but only as they rested on everybody else, and then went back to the red and green tissue paper of the chandelier again. He had accepted the inevitable, then. Indeed, had he not done so, Louie could hardly imagine that he would have been there. Well, it was the most sensible thing he could do. Louie would go and speak to him presently.

Louie made a tour of the rooms. The **E** of reference-books had been turned into a place for sitting out, and in the typewriting-room the lids of two or three desks had been wedged up to form card-tables. Into the room beyond, which was the smoking-room, she did not penetrate. Already a 164
fiddle was tuning up, but Louie had told young Merridew, who had magnanimously asked her for her card, that she did not intend to dance. None the less he had taken her card and scrawled something on it. She had tossed the piece of violet-written pasteboard into a corner.

At nine o'clock there was a tapping on the top of the piano, and the music began. Mr. Mackie and the lady in orange glided out over the French-chalked floor. Two minutes later the room was full of waltzing couples.

Louie had sat down on the opposite side of the room to Mr. Jeffries. Through momentarily clear spaces she saw him from time to time. He did not move from his station by the folding door, where, among the hoppers and caperers who sped past him, he seemed to have something of the stability of a monument in some centre of apparently aimless traffic. Still, he seemed to be enjoying himself, and Louie intended to go across to him when the waltz was over.

A word she overheard, however, caused her to change her mind and to rise to her feet at once. Mr. Mackie, passing with his orange partner, had repeated his jape about the Ruthless Boaz.

Without more ado Louie threaded her way through the dancers and stood before Mr. Jeffries.

"Won't you try to dance?" she said.

As he turned the amber eyes on her she had the feeling that she slid all at once into the field of some piece of apparatus with an object-glass. She was the object. For a moment he forgot his smile; he looked attentively at her; and then the smile returned. He answered in an easy, deep 165
voice, the accent of which was neither Cockney nor yet quite of the mode of the men Louie knew.

"Oh, I—I don't dance," he said.

"Won't you let me teach you?"

His eyes were still on hers. He seemed to give the simple question weighty consideration. Then his eyes dropped to his hands.

"Hallo," he said, as if to himself. His programme was where Miss Levey had put it, dangling from his wrist as if from a hook. Apparently he had not noticed it before. Then, looking at Louie again, he said: "I mean, my gloves—I've no gloves."

"Gloves!" she said quietly. "Come."

She took the absurd programme from his wrist, threw it away, and put her gloved hand into his naked one.

She drew Mr. Jeffries into the current.

Louie had danced with ignoramuses before, but never with a man quite so awkward as this. She

did her best to steer him, but before they had gone half-way round the room they had collided with Evie Soames, leaning back in the crook of young Merridew's arm—with Kitty Windus, tiptoe and leaning forward over her partner—with Mr. Mackie, who had lighted a cigarette and was singing the refrain of the dance as he passed. Then Mr. Jeffries begged her, out of consideration for herself, to stop. But she had no desire to stop. She wondered why, bumped and trampled so, she should want to go on, but she gave that riddle up. He did not cease to apologise for his ungainliness.

But the riddle of why she did not wish to stop refused to be given up. It renewed itself with each of his apologies. Stumbling ludicrously, she knew that she still wished to go on. What she did not 166
know at that time of her life was that she had secrets that hitherto she had kept even from herself.

Then, all in a moment, the strange thing happened. She felt that colour, that stress and anger never brought there, rise slow and warm into her cheeks. Her glance had merely rested for a moment on that hand of hers that lay slender as a willow leaf in his, but the riddle was a puzzle no longer. Abashed, she *had* surprised a secret.

She had caught herself wishing—half wishing—she did not quite know what—that she too had taken off her glove.

Her colour lasted for half-a-minute; then, perhaps because of the colour, her voice became matter-of-fact. She glanced up at him.

"I'm sorry you failed in your examination," she said.

Louie was tall, but his head was clear and away above hers. He looked down, earnest, anxious, smiling, all three.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Why should it?" he added.

Louie had thought that it had mattered a great deal, but she was still a little bewildered. Even out of the answer to the riddle another seemed to have sprung already. She laughed a little.

"Oh—only that one doesn't like to be beaten," she said.

This too he seemed to give profound yet (if such a thing may be) absentminded attention.

"Is anybody ever beaten?" he asked slowly. "I mean, unless they deserve to be?"

Archie and Evie Soames had just overtaken them again, laughing together, as, hand in hand, they took a running glide towards the door. His remark came oddly from a doubly beaten man. What 167
then did he call a beating?... She looked covertly at the two hands again.

"But—mayn't circumstances be too strong for you?"

This again he considered. "Circumstances are strong," he admitted. "But then, if one's a fool, so are a good many other people. There's always that chance, you see."

He spoke as gently as if he had been speaking to a child, but Louie suddenly found herself wondering whether he had accepted the inevitable after all. This hardly sounded like it. She spoke quietly.

"Nobody thinks you're a fool just because you failed—at least I don't."

"Failed?" he repeated, as if puzzled.... "Oh, you mean the examination! Of course I ought never to have gone in for it. (Oh dear, another bump—I'm afraid you find me hopeless.)"

"Not have gone in for it? Why?"

The lion's eyes looked at her in surprise.

"Why? Why, because I failed." He seemed to consider it an entirely conclusive answer.

"But you'll surely try again?" said Louie.

"Eh? 'Try,' did you say?... Oh, the men who have to try are no good. For that matter it's always the duffers who try the hardest. I admit they pull it off, but then things are arranged so that the duffers can pull them off—have to be, I suppose. But the men who aren't duffers——"

He stopped suddenly.

"What?" she said.

But once more she had the feeling that she had only just swum into the field of his vision. It was 168
singularly disconcerting. His smile, which had disappeared, appeared again. He seemed to remember that he was at a dance.

"I suppose you're coming back after Christmas?" he said.

It was not very likely, but she said: "Very likely. You were saying, about the men who aren't duffers——"

Again he got her focus. "Was I? Well, there aren't so many of them that we need bother about them. So you are coming back?"

Louie found him extraordinary, unclassifiable. She could not say that his answers were not ready; they were instant to the point; but somehow they weren't answers. Of course, they *were* answers if you liked, but they seemed in some way to be private communings as well. She wondered whether he was in the habit of talking much to himself; he spoke rather as if he was—as if, his consciousness of her presence notwithstanding, he considered himself to be as good as alone now.

Louie had heard the expression "second self"—well, this, "second self" or not, was certainly a curious accord. And then he allowed that deliberate, altogether discordant smile (that might just as well have been hooked round his ears like a false beard) to come between, and asked her if she was coming back after Christmas!

Then—this came suddenly—she knew for a certainty what hitherto had hung in doubt—that she would not be coming back after Christmas. She must sit down. Of course, it was to have been expected. She had been unwise to dance.

She spoke faintly. "Please take me to a seat." 169

Quite automatically he did so. He led her to the **E** of reference-books. The waltz closed. So did Louie's eyes.

"Please leave me alone for a few minutes," she murmured.

He bowed, and retired as automatically as he had come.

In a few minutes she felt better, but she still sat in the little book-lined recess. Her eyes remained closed, but not now altogether from faintness. She heard Mr. Mackie's voice, apparently a long way off, shouting, "Come on—let's get the ice broken!" and partners were being chosen for the Shop-Girl Lancers. More minutes passed. Louie, her eyes still closed, had begun once more to think of that secret she had surprised within herself.

She doubted herself profoundly now. For all she now knew her nature might contain other such secrets as this that had sent the warm blood into her cheeks at a touch—nay, at the thought of a touch. She might have, so to speak, a basic, unsuspected layer of them, needing only to be stirred to provide surprise after surprise. Those surprises might make all she had hitherto known—all—seem stupid and flat and commonplace. If so, why must the discovery come now? Secrets from herself—now? Impossible!

But, as if limned on her closed lids, she saw the two hands again, her own like a lanceolate leaf, lying within that great masculine engine of his.

And all at once she felt unutterably lonely.

It was some time before she opened her eyes again. By that time Mr. Mackie had succeeded in breaking the ice. The floor shook to the fourth figure of the Shop-Girl Lancers, and Louie saw, beyond the reference-books, the Alcazar beauty swung clear off the ground, a goldfish whirling 170
almost horizontally past. Miss Levey's skirts followed, their owner crying, "Help, help!"... "*For it ain't the proper way to treat a la-ady!*" Mr. Mackie's jubilant voice sang—and when the figure ended there were shouts and clapping of hands and uproarious cries of "Again, again!"

By-and-by Louie rose. She walked up the room again. At the piano Mr. Mackie, who was to sing, was now confidentially humming the air of his song into the hired pianist's ear. Mr. Jeffries, once more looking as if he needed a niche and a plinth, was standing in his original place, by the folding door. Miss Levine and Archie Merridew were half hidden behind the piano; and Kitty Windus, radiant, was openly flirting with the pale student called Richardson. Evie Soames had just spoken to Mr. Jeffries; she was sulking at Archie's desertion of her. Then Mr. Weston announced, solemnly and distinctly, that Mr. Mackie was about to add to the enjoyment of all present by singing a song entitled "That Gorgonzola Cheese." Applause greeted the announcement, and Mr. Mackie, who had slipped behind the piano for a moment and returned with his coat on the wrong side out, began.

Louie found herself once more by the side of Mr. Jeffries.

"I should like some coffee," she said.

The coffee was in an adjoining room. For the first time since she had been at the School Louie did not want to hear Mr. Mackie.

But the hint was lost on Mr. Jeffries.

"Eh? Certainly," he said, and went away in search of the coffee. 171

"'Oh—that—Gorgonzola Cheese!'"

Mr. Mackie sang,

"'It must have been unhealthy, I suppose,
For the old Tom Cat fell dead upon the mat
When the niff got up his nose!'"

Kitty was laughing almost hysterically.

"'Talk about the flavour of the crackling of the pork!

I guess it wasn't half so strong
As the delicate effluvia that filled our house
When the Gorgonzola Cheese went wrong!'"

Mr. Jeffries had returned with Louie's coffee, but Louie barely touched it. Great stupid fellow!

Then he turned to her with some merely banal remark, and Louie, giving it all the answer it deserved, turned and left him.

That unspeakable loneliness had come upon her again.

Louie made no further attempt to talk to Mr. Jeffries. She watched another dance, heard Mr. Weston recite "The Raven," and then went to the cloakroom for her shawl. There she came upon Kitty Windus, who had found it necessary to do up her hair again.

"You surely aren't going?" Kitty exclaimed. She herself was a-tremble with flirtation and happiness. "Why, you're as bad as Mr. Jeffries! Though I will admit that even *he* came out of his shell for once. I shall begin to think Miriam's right soon!" She gave Louie an arch look.

Louie's opinion was that Mr. Jeffries had never been more completely concealed in his shell than he had been that even, but "Oh, has he gone?" she said indifferently. 172

"Yes, a few minutes ago. Isn't everything going splendidly! Why, Mr. Mackie's a host in himself!"

"Quite," said Louie, passing her shawl over her head.

"I suppose we shall see you in the morning?" said Kitty. "Everybody's coming to help to clear away."

"Very well," said Louie.

And as the piano broke into the prelude to the waltz cotillion she left.

But she did not leave that dingy Holborn third floor, never to enter it again, without a grateful word to Mr. Mackie. She came upon him on a landing. His trousers were French-chalked almost to the knees with the vigour of his dancing, and for his next song he had put on a false nose with blue whiskers attached to it. He was making sure that the adornment did not interfere with his whistle.

"Good-bye, Mr. Mackie," said Louie, holding out her hand.

Mr. Mackie stopped the whistle. "What, you toddling, Miss Causton?" he said. "Why, we ain't properly warmed up yet!"

"I must go. And"—she smiled almost fondly at him—"I should like to thank you."

Mr. Mackie was quite conscious of desert. "Not at all," he said. "You mean the 'Gorgonzola Cheese,' I suppose? Went all right, didn't it? Never known that song fail yet: it always gets 'em ——"

"Oh, for more than that. If you're ever thinking of setting up a cure I daresay I could find you a few patients. You're wonderful. Good-bye."

"Say olive oil, but not good-bye—and Merry Christmas," said Mr. Mackie.

But Louie knew that it was good-bye.

PART III
MORTLAKE ROAD

175

I

On a sunny morning in mid-January Louie Causton went to see, but not necessarily to be seen by, her father. Captain Cecil Chaffinger accompanied her. As they walked across Richmond Park they talked.

"You're sure the walk isn't too much for you, Mops?" said the Captain solicitously.

She pressed his arm. "No, I'm ever so much better for it."

"We could get a cart or something at the Star and Garter, you know."

"I'd much rather walk, Chaff. We can take the train back."

"All right, little Mops."

They walked for a few minutes in silence; then—

"That woman wasn't—wasn't a beast, was she?" Chaff asked.

"Mrs. Leggat?"

"If that's her name. I mean, there was no row?"

"Not the least in the world."

The Captain tugged at his moustache. "H'm! Not like you. Ever leave anywhere without a row before, Mops?"

Louie laughed a little. "Now you mention it, I don't think I ever did," she admitted. "But there wasn't a word said. She knew, and I knew she knew. So I cleared out. That was all. She made me some beef-tea before I left." 176

Again they walked in silence.

The daintiest of hoar-frosts lay over the Park; on Putney Heath they had passed skaters. The keen wind had reddened the Captain's nose, and Louie could not help smiling as he took out his handkerchief for the twentieth time. She had remembered Mr. Mackie.

"Ought to have a silk one a day like this," Chaff grunted, blowing hard. "Makes you perfectly raw.... I say, dear old Mops——"

"What, old boy?"

"Anything *I* could have done, you know——"

She squeezed his arm again. "I shall be giving you plenty to do presently. And you say he's not a bad sort."

"Oh——" said the Captain doubtfully.

"Well, you'll take me in, and then wait outside till I've seen for myself."

But at that Chaff rebelled. "Hanged if I do—dash it all, it's a public-house! You'll find me in the parlour or whatever it is."

"How old is he?"

"Let me see: he'll be fifty. Yes, he'll be fifty. Your mother's fifty-four."

"You'll remember your promise, Chaff?"

"About where you are? Oh, I'll be mum as the grave. Don't you forget yours."

"No. You shall come and see me."

The Captain sighed. His Mops was a strange being. That fool Moone had taken the wrong way with her, but a better way might have been found than this. Well, Chaff would have a word or two with Mr. Buck Causton himself.

They continued their walk. 177

When Louie had first resolved that she would seek her father, nothing had seemed more natural. In prospect, the thing had been simplicity itself. But it was, somehow, less simple now. Indeed, its difficulties had increased with every step she took. What about Buck? Must he necessarily make her so very welcome? Suppose, when she made her announcement, he should shake hands, ask how her mother was, offer her tea (or whatever publicans did offer ladies), say he had been very glad to see her, and let her go again? How, in the face of that, could she say: "I am your daughter; I really don't know why I have come; I have stayed away a good long time, but here I am, needing friends; why I need friends I will explain to your wife." Was it not likely that Buck had had more than enough of her family?

Had Chaff, as they descended to Kingston, once more urged that she was on a wild-goose chase, as likely as not she would have turned back at the first word.

They reached Buck's public-house—The Molyneux Arms, near the corner of Kingston Bridge.

"Well," said Chaff, stopping, "what do we do now, Mops?"

"We go in, I suppose," said Louie. Without pausing, she moved towards the largest door (there was "Public Bar" written upon it) of an establishment that, if it lacked the garishness of a modern drinking-palace, was yet not quite the red-curtained, lattice-windowed, Christmas-number hostelry of Louie's imaginings. But Chaff, with a "No, not there," drew her round the corner to a quieter door, where small bay-trees stood in green tubs. The step had a brightly polished brass sill and a thick rubber mat perforated with the name "Molyneux Arms." Beyond the little 178
vestibule were double doors with cut-glass panels and a diagonal brass bar on each and a piston for automatic closing at the top.

"Perhaps you'd better wait here," said Chaff.

"All right," said Louie, now heartily wishing she had not left her new abode in Mortlake Road,

Putney.

With a soft sigh of the piston, the brass-barred doors closed behind Chaff.

This entrance lay in a short blind alley off the main street, the end of which seemed to be closed by a stableyard. Somebody over a brick wall was walking a horse over cobbles, and a man's voice muttered, "Come up." There was a light clashing of harness, and the same voice began a soft but strong singing, hoisting itself to the higher notes as if the interpolated aspirates had been so many stirrups:

> "No re-(*h*)est—but the gra-(*h*)ave
> For the pi-(*h*)ilgrim of Love!——"

Then a back door opened, and a woman's voice was heard.

"A gentleman to see you, James."

The song ceased. "A what, Susan?" said the man's voice. "Remember——"

"A gentleman—in a top hat," said the second voice.

"You know that travellers sometimes have top hats, Susan," cautioned the first voice.

"I'm sure it's a gentleman, James——"

"Very well, let us hope you're not mistaken and that you were hooked up behind. Ask the gentleman to wait a minute."

The voices ceased.

Instinctively Louie had walked to a half-open coach door and had looked through. She saw a bright little picture. A horse was being put into a gay yellow trap, and the man who was buckling 179
the harness had begun to sing again:

> "Oryn—thia, my Belovèd!——"

All that Louie could see of him was a pair of glossy black boots and a pair of grey check trousers cut close about the knee. The harness twinkled; the horse's coat shone in the sun like Mr. Jeffries' hair; and somebody within the stable was running water into a bucket. Then the man came round the horse, and she saw him—cropped silver hair, long dewlapped chin, and a back and shoulders that might have served Henson's turn yet. And as Louie watched, with no more emotion than if the scene had been one on a coloured bioscope, he sang again:

> "Oryn—thia, my Belovèd!——"

Then, as she watched, it came over her for the first time that she had planned and was performing a suspect thing. She had no right to inspect this man and then to know him or not to know him, as she chose. He had no less right to inspect her. She, not he, stood to gain; cards on the table, then; either she must go away at once, taking Chaff with her, or else take her courage in both hands without further spying.

Which was, perhaps, as much as to say that she had already seen and was willing to risk it.

She passed through the half-open door into the yard.

Yet even as she advanced she had a final cowardice. By a man at any rate, anything would be forgiven her, and she really had had a long walk.... There was a bench by the stable door.... But she pulled herself together. No, not that. She was not faint, only very, very pale. She continued to 180
advance.

Then Buck looked up, and their eyes met.

They say of a newly born infant that your first impression of facial resemblance is that to which the child, grown a man, will return. So perhaps it was for one moment with father and daughter. But, if so, it passed instantly. Buck made an upward, deferential gesture of his fore-finger.

"Sha'n't be three minutes, m'm," he said. "Now, Judson, the lady's here! He's just ready, m'm. A beautiful day!"

Then something in Louie's look seemed to strike him.

"It *is* for Mrs. Allonby's, m'm, isn't it? For one-fifteen; one-fifteen Allonby, Richards, seven to-night. You needn't have come; he'll be there sharp."

Louie was looking steadily at her father. "You've made a mistake," she said.

"What? Hi, Judson! What's this?"

"I came—I came—with the gentleman who's just asked for you. Don't you—don't you——" she faltered and stopped.

"But aren't you from Mrs. Allonby's?"

Louie was conscious that she was becoming pitifully flurried. She could not believe now that she had ever thought this would be an easy thing to do. And she would have to do it all herself; he

had a handsome, slightly pompous face, but it was not the face of a man who apprehends things by intuition. She tried again.

"You are Mr. Causton, aren't you?"

"Beg pardon, m'm? You see, one ear——" The Piker had burst the drum of one of Buck's ears. He inclined his head. "What did you say, m'm?" 181

Suddenly Louie put one hand on the shaft of the trap and sank half sitting on the step. The trap dipped. Her pallor was now extreme.

"The gentleman who wishes to see you——" she began again.

"Yes, m'm?"

"I—I came with him——"

"Yes, m'm—aren't you well, m'm?"

"Don't you know me?"

"If it isn't Mrs. Allonby's, one-fifteen——" said Buck.

"His name—the gentleman's name——"

Then, as the horse lifted a foot, she slipped a little on the step. She might not have fallen, but his old and instinctive muscular discipline counted for something. Buck had made a remarkably swift movement, and his arm now supported her. Suddenly she surrendered her weight to him.

"Here, m'm," said the astonished Buck, "come and set down on the bench."

Louie turned up entreating eyes. "You can't guess?"

"If it's Richards, seven——"

"The gentleman's name—I came with—is Chaffinger——"

"You said——?"

"Chaffinger."

She was too close to him to notice that he too had suddenly become white. He still held her, but slowly half a cubic foot of air came from his chest. Probably with a purely mechanical movement he set her on her feet. His hand was at his sound ear. 182

"Will you say it again, m'm?" he said huskily.

Louie did so.

"Cap-Captain Chaffinger, m'm?"

"Oh," Louie choked, "don't call me 'm'm'!"

"You did say Captain Chaffinger?"

Then, leaning limply against the shaft, Louie began to speak low and rapidly.

"Send me away if you like—perhaps I was stupid to come—but I wanted—I wanted—I couldn't bear it any longer—I'm all alone—father! I'm Louie—Louie——"

Only Buck's Maker knows whether even then he fully understood. His grey eyes were stupidly on her grey eyes. Her voice, as she continued to mutter broken phrases, possibly lost itself in his deaf ear; but some other sense informed him that she was telling him that she was his daughter—his daughter——

And then at one of her phrases, he seemed to come sluggishly to life. He repeated the phrase after her.

"Putney, m'm? Did you say Putney?" he said.

"Yes, I live there——"

"You live in Putney? Whereabouts in Putney?"

"Mortlake Road."

Buck made another sluggish effort. A quarter of a century and more before he had said to the Honourable Emily: "*The* Bible, Miss?" Now he said to his daughter:

"*The* Mortlake Road?"

"I suppose so."

"You live there?"

"Yes."

Now Mallard Bois and Trant were more than geographically remote from Buck. They had the

immeasurable remoteness of the Scarisbricks. But Putney was near. To keep himself in spring and condition, he frequently walked over to Putney. Putney was a place you could walk to, and it had streets and houses and a green Tillings' bus. And they rowed the boat race there. Therefore, while it outraged all Order that a Scarisbrick should live there, that fact nevertheless brought his daughter into the same world with himself. For the first time he looked seeingly at her, and as he looked, there vanished, more quickly than a finger is snapped, whatever images of her had beguiled his fancy through the years. 183

This, then, was she, standing against the shaft with head back, lips parted, brows entreatingly drawn, her whole pose an appeal.

"Father," she was saying, smiling crookedly through those rare things, her tears——

Judson came out of the stable. Buck gave him a curt order, and the trap moved away. Its departure left Louie standing by the little bench outside the stable door. Buck had taken a step towards her. He was murmuring something quite ridiculous—something about "strictly for the gentry." Perhaps he remembered that had his little girl been a little boy he would have given her instruction for nothing at the Sparring Academy in Bruton Street.

All in a moment he passed his arm about Louie. Scarisbrick or not, she was going to be a Causton and his for once—just for once. In an hour he might be calling her "m'm" again, but just for once —his face was beautiful.

"That little girl," he said foolishly, holding her with as gentle a fear as if she had been still in her cradle.

Louie's answer was to faint suddenly on his breast. 184

But of the Molyneux Arms in a moment. A word about Mortlake Road first.

Two houses had been thrown into one to form the establishment at which Louie had now resided for a week. Officially it was a nursing home; actually it accepted declared invalids and quite well but unrobust lodgers alike. Miss Cora Mayville "ran" it; her cousin, Miss Dot Mayville, was "sister," and from four to eight uniformed nurses came and went continually. None of them had theories, moral, social, or of any other description; to them things were as they were. Nurse Meekins made Louie's bed as who should say, "Helpers of people in trouble do not go beyond their proper business"; Nurse Chalmers brought her letters or called her to dinner in the narrowminded spirit of one who leaves the systematics of charity to others. All were reprehensibly incurious and shockingly affectionate, and so far was Louie's case from being peculiar that, in the eyes of the law at any rate, Miss Dot Mayville was herself twice a parent. Twice (when, from reasons Lord Moone could have explained, the real parents had refused to do so) she had signed the birth-certificates of undesired infants. This irregularity the registrar for the district held perpetually over her head. She laughed, and held other things over his head in return. They were engaged to be married.

It was to this retreat that Buck drove Louie back that January evening, cutting "Richards, seven" without compunction. Poor Chaff had been sent off soon after lunch; there was somebody else to fetch and despatch his Mops now. Buck lifted Louie from the trap and rang the bell of one of the two brass-plated doors. A German youth dressed as a waiter appeared, and Buck bade him hold the horse. Then he went with Louie up to her room. He took off her hat and coat for her; he 185
seemed unable to leave her. He had learned how it was with her.

He had hardly turned a hair at the news. He accepted it as part of the Scheme of Things. To him also indiscretions were of two kinds—indiscretions, and the indiscretions of the Scarisbricks. Only a wistful look had crossed his face; he had hoped Louie's somebody was a gentleman otherwise than in the top-hat sense of the word; and Louie had reassured him about that. For the rest, it was not for Buck to inquire into the private affairs of these great ones. He would as soon have allowed the young German who held the horse to inquire into his own.

"That little girl," he said once more, holding her away from him at the side of her bed.

"And you won't call me 'm'm,' daddy?" Louie laughed.

Buck gave it thought; it was not so simple as it looked. "And you really took daddy's name?" he asked. He had asked it twenty times already.

"Of course."

"And told all those young ladies?" (Louie had related the incident of Burnett Minor and the "Life and Battles.") "All about daddy and the Piker?"

"Of course!"

Buck found it too wonderful. He enfolded his little girl again.

"But you must go now," Louie said by-an-by.

"But I can come in the morning?"

"Yes. And, daddy——"

"Little girl?" 186

"You'll be good to poor old Chaff? He's fond of me too."

Buck promised that he would. Had there been none other, the tantrums of the Honourable Emily were no doubt bond enough between them.

The next morning Buck had to be told that eight o'clock was too early for a visit, and so, on the next morning again, he did not turn up until eleven. After that eleven became his accustomed hour. Wet or fine was the same to him, and he cancelled all afternoon orders for the trap; his little girl must have the trap at her disposal for a daily drive. And because his fidelity to the Social Order and their own professional tolerances amounted in Louie's case to pretty much the same thing, the nurses one and all fell in love with Buck.

And here, once for all, or at any rate for a long time, a cogent matter may be dismissed, even as those pagan nurses dismissed it. It is Louie's conviction of moral guilt as apart from her persuasion of the practical inconveniences of it. Louie Causton would have been poor stuff for the hot gospeller to practise upon. There were things she would have had undone, and that not merely because the consequences pressed upon her; as they could not be undone, she had begun the tune and intended to fiddle it out. What she saw fit to hide her historian hides also. Louie seized what happiness she could, and it served. She was sorrier for Chaff than she was for herself. She would have been less happy had she taken Uncle Augustus's way out.

And whether the days were happy or not, at any rate they were peacefully alike. Breakfast with the nurses, a morning or afternoon drive with Buck or a walk along the river bank or on Putney 187
Heath, tea (if they drove) perhaps at Kingston, supper with the nurses again, and bed—that was the tale of them. She kept her promise to Chaff; several times he came to see her. Twice he met Buck. At these meetings the shade of the Honourable Emily almost visibly presided.... Chaff tried to talk of "Lives and Battles," Buck of the same—it was not for him to choose topics before his betters. And once, but once only, Buck brought Mrs. Buck, formerly Susan Emmidge, the chemist's servant at Mallard Bois. He hooked her up behind himself before they left Kingston, and Louie did her the same service at the end of the visit. For the rest, if Louie wanted to see her father's second wife she had to go to the Molyneux Arms to do so.

II

As the singer of "The Pilgrim of Love" Buck was known far and abroad up the Thames. It will be believed that he contrived to get an infinite personal pathos into the song; he also made of it, by means of those gratuitous aspirates, an affective athletic exercise in breathing.

> "No re-(*h*)est—but the gra-(*h*)ave
> For the Pi-(*h*)ilgrim of Love!——"

As he closed his eyes at each soaring, the effect was as if he inwardly looked back on that remarkable pilgrimage of his own. Bidden to marry, he had married; bidden to unmarry and to marry again, he had done so; and at a word from Louie he would have taken up the pilgrimage once more.

But while Buck exalted the Scarisbricks high above himself, so also he exalted himself high above 188
all beneath him. He ruled the Molyneux Arms with a rod of iron. Only mediately and through him would the two barmaids have dared to address Louie; and his wife's position was altogether anomalous. It was only because Louie would have it so that she sat down to tea with them; and, what with her hooks and eyes and Buck's perpetual admonitions, there was little rest but the grave for her either. Buck subscribed to the *Almanack de Gotha* and *Modern Society*; these were always to hand; but *The Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*, which he took in the way of business, was kept out of Louie's way. Mr. Mackie he would have torn from limb to limb. Far more royalist than the king was Buck; Radicalism was chaos, which word he pronounced "tchayoss." Of pugilism, save to Chaff, he never spoke. "God bless the Squire and his relations."

And (Louie thought) God bless this simple-hearted father of hers also. Buck in the ring had been a better man than Uncle Augustus in the House of Lords, and Henson would not have looked twice at Chaff. Granted he was pompous; with a little more pompousness her mother would have come more creditably out of that old affair. So much for the Scarisbricks. Already, in January, Louie loved her father; by March his daily visit was a necessity of her life. She had been right; her destiny was quite as likely to be bound up with Buck and his beer-pumps as with anything in that dingy old Business School.

Of the Business School she still thought a good deal, however. She could not forget the interesting little drama of which she had seen, as it were, the first act. Somehow, time and distance had simplified some of its details without diminishing her interest in it, and, as she 189
walked along the Putney towpath by day, or lay awake in her white-painted room at night, she wondered that this should be so. By the brutal logic of events, Rainham Parva should have been nearer to her than Holborn; but Rainham Parva seemed now disproportionately remote. Why?

Had the conclusion which persisted in presenting itself not been impossible, perhaps she would not have faced it so frankly. It was impossible—manifestly absurd—that Mr. Jeffries should have any hold on her imagination. Therefore she allowed herself to consider it. No doubt the fancies

which filled her head would pass and be forgotten.

Give them a month, then—two months.

She gave them that, and more. They did not pass. But that, no doubt, was due to the curious interrupted story. She felt as if she was reading an interesting serial tale, for the next instalment of which she was suddenly required to wait another month. She wanted to know what was going to happen among the fair, perky boy, the girl who resembled Polly Ross, the lionlike Mr. Jeffries, and that apocryphal fourth actor in the piece. When she had learned that she would close the book. In the meantime she occupied herself, as serial readers do, with guessing.

The spring was advancing towards May when there happened something that suddenly precipitated her guessings. Buck still came daily, but she walked more in the back garden of the nursing home now and less on the heath and on the towpath, and drove, when she did drive, more slowly. Sometimes on her drives a nurse accompanied her. Her doctor found her health excellent.

The thing that happened began with Richenda Earle. Some weeks before, Louie had had a letter 190
from Richenda forwarded from Sutherland Place, which she had neglected to answer; and Richenda had apparently written again, this time to her sister. Louie now gathered that Mrs. Leggat had kept the reason for her disappearance from Mr. Weston, but not from Richenda. By way of Richenda and Mr. Weston it had now reached the Business School. A hastily scrawled letter from Kitty Windus informed Louie of this. Kitty wanted to come and see her.

Well, there was no reason why Kitty should not come. Louie wrote and told her so.

She came on a Saturday afternoon. It was not urgently necessary that Louie should have received her in bed, but the recollection of the spinster's peering eyes held some obscure prompting. Moreover, to receive Kitty in bed would be an intimation that the call must not be a long one, and she had arranged its duration with Miss Dot Mayville.

"Miss Windus," Miss Dot announced, and Kitty entered.

She had brought Louie a bunch of violets; that was the first of several new amenities Louie noticed in her manner. Louie discouraged the second amenity, which was a shy motion as if to embrace her. And the third showed when, after a few minutes in which Kitty's fluttered spirits had become a little calmer (*she* was not the one to turn her back on people in trouble, she had said, let others hold up their heads as they pleased), she wistfully took Louie's hand on the coverlet. She had cried over Louie a little. Her eyes were still wet.

"Of course—but I don't know whether you've heard—I might have been just like everybody else, 191
only something else has made an awful difference too," she said, her eyes downcast.

"Oh? What else?" Louie asked a little offhandedly. She had not wanted to be wept over.

"Oh, then you haven't heard.... I'm engaged. I've been engaged nearly two months."

"Really? Then I must congratulate you. Is it a secret who to?"

"No," said Kitty. "It's to Mr. Jeffries."

Slowly Louie sat up. She turned, as if, like Buck, she had been deaf on one side. "*Who?*" she asked.

"Yes. To Mr. Jeffries. Since early in March. You remember he told Archie there was somebody?—and," Kitty became suddenly voluble, "I couldn't believe my ears at first. I'd never dreamed—never dreamed. And after I'd been such a beast—I don't mean a beast exactly, but getting at him, you know. I was just as bad as the others—about his baths and all that. Oh, I did feel ashamed—as mean as mean—oh!" She choked a little. "I don't mind saying it now, but I'd—I'd begun to be afraid I should *never* get off!"

"Yes—no, I mean," Louie murmured, dazed.

"Just fancy, it's being me! That night, when he asked me, I thought I should have gone clean off it. Sometimes I can hardly believe it yet. I hadn't a notion—not a notion! And it makes everything perfectly wonderful, knowing a man's so struck on you, though he *is* quiet and don't say much about it. Of course they mean all the more, that sort. We walk along the streets, but he won't let me stop out late for fear of tiring me, and he always takes me right to the door, and I'm trying hard not to be selfish, but it makes me so sorry for other girls who haven't got off—and perhaps if 192
I sell some of my shares to start us with we can get married next year—if he gets a permanency, that is."

Louie was still thunderstruck. Mr. Jeffries engaged to—Kitty Windus! That unnamed personage was—Kitty Windus! She, Louie, was asked to believe *that*, in the face of all she had seen!

"I am glad," she found herself murmuring again.

"Did *you* guess?" Kitty asked eagerly. She would have given her ears to be told that somebody else had guessed.

"No," Louie replied, and added, seeing Kitty's fallen face: "I should have thought Mr. Merridew. You seemed such great friends."

At that Kitty broke in: "Poor Archie! I said it made one selfish.... His father's very ill. We were going on Putney Heath to-day, all four of us, Archie and Evie and Jeff and me; but Archie had a wire to go home this morning, poor Archie, and so I'm going to meet the others by-and-by. But anyway, if anything does happen, he'll be able to get married as soon as he likes—he's an only son."

At this Louie was even more startled. Mr. Jeffries and the Soames girl together at that moment! She remembered those irrevocable looks.

"So Mr. Merridew and Miss Soames are engaged, then?" she said.

"Well," Kitty admitted, "it comes to the same thing. They're as good as. I wish Jeff was coming into a bit, like Archie."

"You say they're here, at Putney, this afternoon?"

"Jeff and Evie? Yes. I'm meeting them at five." 193

Even as Louie was inwardly predicting that Kitty would not see her Mr. Jeffries at five, Miss Dot Mayville entered. But Louie did not want Kitty to go just yet. She wanted to know more of this extraordinary development of her drama. "May we have some tea?" she asked, and Miss Dot went out again. Louie lay back on her pillow and frowned at the foot of her white-painted bed.

"It's very kind of you to give up your afternoon to me," she said by-and-by.

"Oh, my dear, as if I wouldn't!" Kitty broke out almost reproachfully. "I keep telling myself I mustn't be selfish, when Jeff and I have years before us—I'm just beginning to realise it—years—and, oh dear, here I am, selfish again, talking all about myself and never a word about you."

But Louie did not want words about herself. She wanted to hear all, all, about Kitty and Mr. Jeffries. The thing became more incredible moment by moment.

"I'm sorry about Mr. Merridew's father," she said presently. "I suppose Miss Soames is very much upset?"

"Frightfully," said Kitty. "But Jeff's looking after her. It was he who persuaded her to go out this afternoon. It's better for her than moping indoors."

"Perhaps Mr. Merridew asked him to."

"Oh no. He only got the wire this morning. But it isn't a surprise. Jeff saw him last night——" She checked herself. She had no gibes about brown-paper parcels now.

"Well, you'll be quite a courting quartet," said Louie presently, with a brightness she did not feel.

"Yes; jolly, isn't it? But there, I'm simply *not* going to talk about myself one moment longer. I feel 194
a regular beast. But it's only because I'm so happy. Now let's talk about you. How long are you going to be here? What sort of people are they? Isn't it fearfully expensive? Are you frightened?"

The suppressed inquisitive questions and Louie's preoccupied parries lasted through tea. At a quarter to five Kitty rose. Again Louie found herself wondering whether Kitty would see her Mr. Jeffries that day. Kitty bent over her.

"I should like to kiss you, dear, if you'd let me," she said timidly. "You wouldn't believe what a difference it makes. And I'd love to come again; I love little babies. Now I must run. I won't say a word to Miriam Levey; you know what she is—but I simply must learn not to say those things. Good-bye, dear."

And she was off, waving her skimpy hand from the door.

Louie did not know why her heart should ache already, as at a premonition—for she had no certitude. Indeed, in all that portion of her relation to Mr. Jeffries she had no certitude; but she was only a little less certain on that account. Already she entirely rejected the figment in which Kitty so pathetically believed. Months before she had snapped her fingers at his impudent tale of a shadowy *fiancée*; now she wondered whether he had not been caught in his own trap and found himself compelled, by mere daily exigencies, to give that shadow substance—the substance of Kitty. Impossible—and yet the conceivable alternatives were equally impossible! Incredible that he should have chosen Kitty for his stalking-horse—yet whom else had there been to choose? If this really was a putting-upon the Business School, Mr. Jeffries would see to it that his dupe was 195
as known as his purpose was secret. That left him three candidates from whom to choose indifferently—Kitty, Miriam Levey, and herself.

In her indignation she was unconscious of the pink that crept like a danger signal into her cheeks.

That poor, unconscious, betrayed woman!

Good gracious! It was blackguardly and monstrous! Kitty of all women! To have "predestined spinster" written large all over you was bad enough, without being played upon thus and then cast back into spinsterhood after all! And this new softness of Kitty's, this timid opening of the heart, this new, awkward unselfishness, these pathetic little maxims of conduct! The man must be a cur. Deliberately to waken a heart that was sealed, asleep and not unhappy, and then to leave it to a pain it must keep for ever—good gracious!

Still ignorant of the tell-tale red in her own cheeks, she found Mr. Jeffries vile.

But she must be just to Mr. Jeffries. Perhaps she was wrong. Perhaps there was—nay, there must be—something she didn't know. Why, even if Mr. Jeffries could be so cruel, Kitty herself could hardly be so blind. Struggle with new magnanimities as she would, jealousy was native to Kitty, and jealousy has sharp eyes. No, she, Louie herself, was building a fantastic fabric. It was mere common-sense that Kitty must be supposed to be capable of looking after herself.

But it was one thing to tell herself that she must suspend her judgment and another to do it. That theory of hers seemed to unroll itself brightly and convincingly before her again. She would discard it when she found one that better explained the known facts. Mr. Jeffries was with Evie 196
Soames at that moment. Louie's thoughts flew to Evie Soames.

It was then that she became conscious that her cheeks were hot. It was then also that she told herself angrily that they were not, and found them grow hotter still. The hotter they grew the more she denied their heat. Why should they grow hot? And even granting that they were hot, wasn't this imposture that was being practised on Kitty enough to make anybody's cheek hot? That was it. That discovery made, she admitted the heat—for Kitty's sake. That that great, taciturn, clever man should be infatuated by that pretty fool she resented—for Kitty's sake. That his sleek head, bright as the coat of Buck's horse, should stoop over that empty dark one she found ironically unfit—for Kitty's sake. She told herself all this, forgetting that she had just set Kitty's engagement down also as an absurdity. Her indignation would have been neither more nor less honest had Mr. Jeffries engaged himself (as according to her theory he might quite well have done) to Miriam Levey.

Or to herself.

She lay, the colour coming and going.

At last she roused herself and sat up. "Pretty thoughts for an expectant mother!" she muttered. "I'll go downstairs and talk to Dot."

She dressed, and descended to the nurses' sitting-room in the basement.

Miss Dot and her Registrar were there; they had just come in from a walk. They were telling of a nightingale they had heard sing near Queens Mere. "Oh, and we saw your friend again, the one who came to tea," said Miss Dot, turning to Louie. 197

Louie pricked up her ears. "Oh? Alone?" she said quickly.

"Yes. Coming down Putney Hill."

"Yes, she said she was going to take a walk," Louie remarked.

But to herself she cried with conviction: "I knew it—I knew it—I knew it!"

For the rest of the evening she was lost in her own thoughts. Miss Cora Mayville worked a hand sewing machine; Miss Dot and her Registrar played bézique at a separate table; other nurses, in print aprons or cloaked and bonneted, came and went; but Louie sat and gazed into the fire. When spoken to she smiled mechanically and then resumed her gazing. There was no more continuity in her thoughts than there was in the shape of the flames that illumined her grey eyes. Roy appeared in them for a moment or two—she had seen Roy's name in *The Gazette* a week before—and then Roy was supplanted by Burnett Minor. Her old French governess at Trant popped up for no particular reason, and then she too gave place to Mr. Mackie. She heard Buck saying again, "That little girl"—and then came a wrangle between Dot and her Registrar. In the adjoining kitchen she heard sounds of frying, and then somebody came in to lay the table for supper. The gas rose and whistled as the stove in the next room was turned off. The three night nurses came down. Louie had her gruel where she sat, and at half-past nine went upstairs again. She got into bed, and dreamed that night that she was dancing with Mr. Jeffries again at the breaking-up party. Her hand lay like a willow leaf in his. "*You* understand," he was saying to her; "it's no good hiding things from *you*; *you've* got the key of it all. It had to be somebody, and you'd 198
left. There was only Kitty for it. You see what an ignominious thing you escape. Don't tell me how degrading it is; I know it; but I'd do it a thousand times for the woman I loved and meant to marry."

Louie knew, in her dream, who that was.

Then she awoke with a start. The street lamp outside, shining through the venetian blinds, made long bars of light on the walls and ceiling. The hot-water bottle at her feet was cold. She heard the creaking of Dot's bed in the little dressing-room adjoining, and the minute ticking of her watch on the table by her bed-head. But what had woke her had been the sound of her own reply, in her dream, to Mr. Jeffries.

"You'll shuffle Kitty off," she had replied, still dancing with him, "but *I* should have found a way to keep you."

Then, with a deep sigh, she turned and went to sleep again.

III

Her boy was born towards the end of June. Her mother did not visit her; instead, she sent a letter the chief characteristic of which was fright that she had dared even so far to disobey her brother. Louie understood, and in her dictated reply made allowances. She wondered whether she should write to Roy also, but in the end did not. The child was born at three o'clock in the morning; he was hardly six hours old when Buck arrived. The old champion stood looking down on his little girl's little boy. It was long before he spoke. 199

"I wasn't let see you," he said, two big tears rolling down his cheeks.

"You shall teach him to box, daddy," said Louie, smiling up at him.

But Buck shook his head. "No, no," he said gently—"except just to take care of himself—when he's fourteen, perhaps—if I'm here. Swimming, not sparring. They're a queer lot, them in the ring."

"You must go now, Mr. Causton," said Miss Dot.

The boy was thirty hours old when there arrived for him a great case of toys suitable for a child of four. Buck and Chaff had been round the toyshops together. Mrs. Buck, disobeying her husband for the only time in her life, came by stealth with a flannel binder that might have enwrapped a six-pounds' child; Jim (as Louie had decided to call him), weighed ten pounds, beef to the heel.

He throve at once, and continued to thrive.

The pair of them were the pride of that pagan Putney Nursing Home.

The first of the two incidents that may be allowed to close this portion of Louie's story was a second visit by Kitty Windus to Louie.

She came at ten o'clock at night, and only with difficulty obtained admission. She was allowed ten minutes, on the condition that Louie was awake. Louie was awake. Kitty neither lifted her veil nor asked to see the child. There was no trace now of her little maxims of conduct; she spoke agitatedly, and out of a stinging, jealous pain.

"I've come to ask you something, Miss Causton, and you've got to tell me," she announced, without preface. "I've a right to know." 200

"Speak a little lower," said Louie, glancing at the babe. "Sit down and tell me what it is."

But Kitty would not sit. Incapable of grandeurs of style, she nevertheless attempted them.

"I don't know whether you happen to be aware what people are saying about you," she said. Her boat-shaped hat and Inverness cape gave her a little the appearance of a scanty tree with which some topiary artist had done his best.

Louie could not help smiling a little; she could have that kind of thing out with herself without calling in Kitty.

"My dear! Of course I know they might be saying anything!" She drew her child a little closer to her.

"Suppose we keep the my dears till we've finished talking," said Kitty coldly. "I mean what they're saying at the Business School."

Louie spoke quietly. "I suppose you mean about me and my boy?"

"Yes, I do mean that, and I've come to ask you to your face; *I'm* not the one to beat about the bush! I want to know who——" There was no need for Kitty to complete the sentence.

"You won't know that," said Louie, more quietly still.

"Ah! perhaps you won't tell me because you daren't?"

"I've not told anybody, and I'm not going to tell you. I'd die first. Perhaps before we go any further you'll tell me why you want to know?"

"You don't suppose I'd ask you if it wasn't my business, do you?"

Slowly Louie turned her eyes on her. She spoke slowly too. "We should get on more quickly if you didn't jump so to conclusions," she said. "I don't know what your conclusions are, but you seem to 201
have made your mind up about something. If you'll change your tone I'll talk to you; if you won't, I won't."

At that Kitty began to sob. She had to lift her veil in order to put a wisp of wet handkerchief to her eyes. But she changed her tone.

"I only want to know," she said. "And I don't want to know if it isn't my business. But I *have* seen him look at you, and he *did* dance with you, and when they said——"

"Who said?" Louie interrupted; but she had already made a guess. "And said what?"

"Jeff, of course," Kitty replied. "Miriam Levey noticed him looking at you first, but after that I saw for myself. And you did dance with him. I might forgive him, but I'd never, never forgive *you*."

Louie suddenly put a question. Apparently it was for nothing less preposterous than that question that Kitty was here.

"One moment," she said. "Do you mean there's something about Mr. Jeffries and myself you want to know?"

"Yes; and I mean to know," Kitty snapped.

"And that's all?"

"Enough, *I* should say!"

"Please hear me out. In fact"—Louie paused for a moment and then rapped out sharply—"you want to know whether my lover was Mr. Jeffries?"

"That'll do to be going on with," said Kitty sullenly.

"Then I'll tell you if you'll tell me who said he was."

"I don't see what that's got to do with it, but I'll tell you if you like. Archie Merridew said so. There!" 202

Archie Merridew!—But Louie restrained her gasp. "Thank you," she said. "May I ask whether you've asked Mr. Jeffries? *He* might be in a position to know, you know."

"No, I haven't."

"But evidently you've seen something in his manner that would make it not quite impossible?"

"I tell you, you've danced with him, and he's looked at you in a sort of way—more than once, Miriam says—and you're trying to shuffle out of the question," said Kitty, her suspicions aflame again.

"Oh, I'll answer the question! If it had been he"—she glanced at the little head under her breast—"I'd tell you in a minute—for my baby's sake, you see. But it was not; and you might have saved yourself a journey if you'd gone to him first. And now please tell me a little more."

Kitty still looked at her suspiciously. "You said you'd die sooner than tell," she cried quaveringly.

"You mean you don't believe me? Well, I can't make you. If I told you the truth you'd just think I'd made up a name."

"It *was* somebody else?" cried Kitty eagerly.

If it wasn't Mr. Jeffries, naturally—there was the child——

"Oh, I *want* to believe you!" Kitty suddenly broke out.

Louie laughed desperately. "Well, my dear, you may. If it was so, I suppose you'd get it out of me. It isn't, that's all. And now I think I've a right to know exactly what this Mr. Merridew has been saying."

Kitty looked hard at her for one moment longer, and then sank on her knees by the side of the bed. She had no choice but to believe. She broke into a torrent of words, low-spoken, not to rouse the child. Louie heard them, amazed. Slowly her incredulity turned into contempt. 203

The horrid little beast! But, after all, she was not surprised. It was all in his character. Perhaps he had been drunk; perhaps it was merely a fancy-stationery idea of humour. Not that she minded a straw; she laughed; she supposed she was there to have stones thrown at her; it was merely a little annoying that they were not thrown straighter. She could picture the over-pocket-monied little bounder, measuring all pecks out of his own bushel, leaning up against a bar somewhere, probably too fuddled to distinguish his own humorous fancy from a story of life with names given, and believing it himself by the time he had repeated it once or twice.

The little worm!

"But," she said presently, disgustedly smiling, "*you* remember when I came to the School, and that I asked *you* who Mr. Jeffries was——"

"Of course!" said Kitty, suddenly entirely believing. "How absurd! But oh, I do love him so."

Louie mused.

"And he—Mr. Jeffries—knows nothing about this, you say?" she asked presently.

"No. He thinks something's wrong. He's been teaching at the School, you know, and of course he must have wondered what was the matter all this last week."

"It's a week since Mr. Merridew—did me this favour?"

"Yes. But perhaps Jeff thought——" She checked herself.

"What? I think I ought to know what Mr. Jeffries may have thought." 204

Kitty hesitated, and then, with a little burst, told her. It was curious. It appeared that Mr. Jeffries had been very hard up indeed, so hard up that, quite recently, he had actually had to take a

position as a commissionaire. It was known, and possibly he had set any oddities of behaviour towards himself down to that.

A commissionaire! Louie was astounded.

"And aren't you going to tell him?" she managed to get out.

"I must, the very next time I see him."

"You mean to-morrow?"

"I don't know. You see"—Kitty hesitated again—"he's left the School. Practically been dismissed. He's got some work at Bedford now."

"Dismissed on account of this?"

"I expect so."

"And now, of course, you've got to tell him that you believed this?"

Kitty dropped her head on the bed. She gave a little moan. "I don't know how I shall ever do it!" she groaned in the bedclothes.

Louie considered herself entitled to agree that it wouldn't be easy.

Presently Kitty rose. She crossed to Louie's mirror and adjusted the boat-shaped hat. Then she came back to the bedside again and craned her head forward.

"May I see the baby?" she asked.

"Another time, I think," said Louie, her lips compressed.

Kitty left.

Louie's mind was in a whirl. At her request, Kitty had turned out the gas before leaving, and only a nightlight glimmered on the little invalid's table. She gazed at it. So she too had been haled into 205
the drama!

On the young fancy stationer she wasted never a thought, either of indignation or of anything else; but Kitty—Evie Soames—Mr. Jeffries—Roy—herself!—What a nightmare—what a pantomime! What an incredible genius this Mr. Jeffries seemed to have for getting himself into complications and dragging other people after him! It might well have puzzled anybody—anybody who had not the key of the puzzle—to know which among them all he really had honoured with his choice! Only Miss Levey seemed to be immune. Surely, for the sake of completeness, he could have found a way of dragging her in too!

Louie had to hold her key exceedingly firmly in order to retain even that lunatic theory that seemed to be the truth.

By dint of holding fast, however, the theory still stood the strain. Evie Soames and Mr. Jeffries were still the central figures of the piece. Kitty was still the stalking-horse behind which, for whatever reasons, he machinated. She herself was still merely dragged in at the whim of a vicious little scoundrel over whose tongue whisky and calumnies ran indifferently, and this little beast was still engaged, or all but engaged, to Evie Soames. Yes, the triangle re-established itself. Kitty and herself were no more than imported complications. The big man and the red-waistcoated youth were still the protagonists, and they faced one another over the stupid little head of Evie Soames.

And yet Louie, lying with her boy at her breast and blinking at the nightlight, refused to class herself with the superfluous Kitty. She did not see herself in a "walking on" part. Though she 206
made her entry late, something told her that she would have a word to say—or else it was a botched and mangled piece indeed. Of life itself as a botched and mangled piece she had no conception; though she kept her thoughts of Him locked within her own breast, it was still the bed of them that there *was* an Artist over all. But for a false start she would have been on the stage now, and she would have given a voice to that pitiful part of poor Kitty's. Say she had not left that Holborn School when she did—she remembered that breaking-up dance—had one more opportunity like that been given to her——

Then in the darkness she coloured violently. She had realised her own thoughts. This was as much as to say that she would have accepted Kitty's rôle—would have consented to be an understudy—would, like other understudies, have ousted the principal in time—would have topped the bill with a man the latest of whose mysterious activities was that he had been a commissionaire——

She loved, or was on the point of loving, Mr. Jeffries——

"Nonsense!" she ridiculed herself.

But nonsense or not, it was stronger than all her efforts to think about something else. Perhaps it was her own false start that set her wondering, and ever returning to her wonder, whether he had not made one too. He seemed to have set up the figure of Evie Soames in his own imagination, and probably had not looked at Evie Soames as she actually was since. He seemed to have his full share of that masculine vanity which will have nothing to do with the compromise

by which the world jogs on; his rapt, lion's eyes might see visions afar off, and he would not as much as know that his shins were black and raw with the bruises of the hard facts among which he stumbled. Little as Louie knew of him, she thought she knew that. Lucky Evie Soames, who might be as stupid as the mud beneath her feet, yet in one man's blind, far-seeing eyes could do no wrong! 207

But of course it was nonsense that Louie should have to recognise Evie Soames for her rival.

Yet, on one other point, as she lay with the babe at her breast and her eyes fixed on the little flame of the nightlight, she was already prepared to make a wager with herself. Her theory was still only a theory; she could not prove it; but it could prove itself. It would work out or it would not work out; if it worked out—well, Louie was a woman, and no woman hesitates for a single moment to put on the mantle of the prophet. Indeed, she had prophesied long before. "Circumstances are strong," this Mr. Jeffries who had since been a commissionaire had admitted when she had danced with him, "but is anybody ever beaten unless they deserve to be?" And he had taken his failure in the examination as a sign that he ought not to have gone in for it, and had refused to enter again. Yes, the earthenware vessel was on the point of collision with the one of bronze, and which would break the months or the weeks or the days would show. Kitty must not think that it availed a predestined spinster anything that she got engaged; Mr. Jeffries would never marry Kitty.

And if Louie herself had returned to the Business School after Christmas——

Her dream of how she had danced with him, and he had said "*You* understand," and she had replied, "*I* should have found a way to keep you," returned vividly to her—— 208

She would have found a way.

Then she remembered that which even then had stood between.

Excitedly she clutched her boy to her—he woke with the pressure, and gave a little croaking cry.

This, then, was the first of the two things that remained to be told about this part of Louie's story.

For the second of them she had neither years nor months to wait, but a bare fortnight. A very few words will tell it.

One evening after the boy had been put to bed she went down into the nurses' parlour and helped Dot and Nurse Chalmers to overhaul the blouses in which the doctors operated. Besides themselves, only Miss Cora was present; she was reading an evening paper. Louie saw her purse her lips and then throw the paper away. Presently Louie, tossing a patched blouse aside, reached for the paper.

A few minutes later Miss Cora, with a "Why, what's the matter?" started forward and bent over her. Louie had gone deathly white.

"It's nothing—I shall be all right presently," she muttered, her eyes closed.

Miss Cora took the paper. The page at which she herself had last looked was still uppermost. It contained an account of a suicide.

"What is it, dear?" Miss Cora asked again. "Not that?" She pointed to the paragraph. Indeed, there was little else of interest on the page.

"I shall be all right in a minute," Louie murmured again.

There was nothing remarkable about the suicide. A young man had hanged himself behind his bedroom door, and a verdict in accordance with the evidence (which, it was suggested, was largely medical) had been returned. He had left a letter for his mother, precisely like almost every other such letter, and parts of it were quoted. The young man's name was Archie Merridew. He was to have been married on the morrow. 209

"Is that it?" Miss Cora asked again.

Louie nodded.

"Did you know him?"

Louie made no reply.

They are experienced women at nursing homes; especially about suppressed medical evidence they are able to draw conclusions. The next morning a few rapid guarded words passed between Louie and Miss Cora. The effect of them was to give Louie a sudden feeling of nausea. Miss Cora's whispered explanation seemed only too probable. That also was all in his character.

"That's it, you may be sure," said Miss Cora. "They ought to be lethal-chambered, nasty little sewer-rats; one of 'em's saved them the trouble at any rate. Did you know the girl he was going to marry too?"

"Yes," said Louie.

"Well, she's had an escape. But don't think about it. You have your own little boy. Come into the garden till your father comes and then have a nice long drive. Shall we wrap Jimmy up and let

him go with you?"

That, then, was the second thing; but already Louie had heard a prophetical whisper in her soul.

PART IV
PILLAR TO POST

213

I

When, in the October of 1896, Louie Causton left Mortlake Road, with half the nurses of the home waving their handkerchiefs after her, she went to a house near the Parson's Green end of Wandsworth Bridge Road. As she left that house before Christmas, going to another one near the Walham Green Town Hall, there is no need to describe it. Neither need the Walham Green house be described, since from there she went, in February 1897, to yet another house, in a street off the Bishops Road, Fulham. These and other removals did not necessitate the use of a pantechnicon; a four-wheeler sufficed on each occasion. Louie, the boy and the nurse went inside; the top was quite big enough for her belongings. She stuck to the south-western district; at no time did she move farther east than when she took two rooms in Cheyne Walk, over a bicycle shop near the Chelsea suspension bridge—which rooms, by the way, she was forced to leave at an hour's notice, her landlord, a man of straw, being himself ejected and involving his sub-tenant in his own catastrophe. She kept to this district because of its nearness to Kingston and the Molyneux Arms. By the time the boy was nine months old she was living in Tadema Road, not far from where the Chelsea power-station now stands.

The nurse whom she had engaged was a link—save for Chaff the only one—with Trant. She was, indeed, her own old French governess, once Céleste Martin, now Céleste Farnier and a widow. 214
She was a Provençale, from Arles. On the death of her husband, which had taken place while Louie had been still at the home in Mortlake Road, she had sought out Chaff with a sheaf of testimonials, and by-and-by Louie had engaged her. She paid her ten shillings a week, on the distinct understanding that she must not hesitate to accept the first decent post that offered. It was already plain that, even if Céleste could have brought herself to leave the little girl to whom she had taught the order of the personal pronouns in French, her affection for Master Jim would have haled her back again.

Louie changed her abode so frequently for one reason and another. In perhaps a third of the cases the landladies to whom she offered herself as a lodger found reasons for asking her to leave when they saw that her letters were addressed to "Miss Causton." Then, to save cab fares, Louie began to make her position plain at the outset. Sometimes this made a difference, sometimes none. On the whole, London S.W. showed itself charitable or merely indifferent. By May 1897 she was at another house in Wandsworth Bridge Road.

She had not refused to accept, easily and as a loan, a sum of money from Buck; but thrice she had well-nigh quarrelled with Buck because she would accept it only as a loan. Twice, for the same reason, she had had tussles with Chaff. But money, until she should find something settled to do, she must have. No doubt Richenda Earle would have shaken her head and have pointed out that now Louie not only had the Scarisbricks behind her, but a prosperous publican also; but Louie, though she lived as frugally as if she had to earn every penny, did not see why her boy 215
should go short while there was money to be had. She took the sensible view of the matter, and borrowed, while walking her shoes out and answering advertisements for this, that and the other.

Up to the summer of '97 her occupations had been almost as various as her addresses. She very soon discovered that her Holborn training was of little use to her, and she could not (as also she discovered) play the piano well enough to give lessons. What she dreamed of, of course, was a comfortable private secretaryship; no young woman is so ill-trained or so incompetent but she fancies herself good enough for a private secretaryship. Perhaps Uncle Augustus might have helped her to one, but she would have nothing to do with Uncle Augustus; and Chaff was unable to beat up anything of the kind. Buck's proposal, that she should keep his books, had been the cause of their second altercation. Common-sense in the matter of borrowing she was prepared to be; beyond that point she remembered her pride and Richenda's words. So for the present she was spared the worst of the pinch.

So, in the early part of that year, she was in an A.B.C. cash-desk, traveller for a History, and saleswoman at an Earls Court chocolate-stall. Then, in June, she obtained, actually in the face of considerable competition, a place in the showrooms of a Bond Street photographer. Perhaps her dresses, of which several still remained, helped her to this place. She wrote letters, arranged appointments, answered press and other calls on the telephone, and received sitters. No doubt some of these knew Uncle Augustus. Robson, of the Board of Trade (who came one day), would probably know him; so would George Hastie, Robson's friend and colleague, and perhaps Sir

Peregrine Campbell and others. Some of them, the more sporting sort, might even know Buck too, for Buck was still a tradition; in short, Louie's own position amused her immensely. By taking her letters home with her and leaving a younger assistant in charge, she was frequently able to leave the showrooms by half-past four and to spend the evenings with Céleste and her boy. Incidentally, Louie improved her French a good deal, for Céleste crooned over the boy in French and English indifferently.... "The darleeng—the lo-ove—the précieux—oh, oh, oh, mais il existe—il manifeste, le petiot——"; and she would break off to sing, in a cracked voice, "Le Pont d'Avignon," or some lullaby of Frédéric Mistral. She idolised the infant; when he was put to bed she did not delay long to follow him, for Louie, who had her work to do during the day, must not be roused at night; and so Louie frequently sat alone, writing her letters or wrapped in her own musings. She received thirty-five shillings a week. Her job had the appearance of a "permanency." In July she got a "rise" of three shillings a week. She also got ten days' holiday, the greater part of which she spent in the company of her father. She was beginning to know what holidays meant now. 216

On one of those days she had an unexpected little meeting in Richmond Park. Céleste and the boy had gone on by train, and she was walking. The meeting was with a girl called Myrtle Morris, who, when Louie had kept the confectionery stall at Earls Court, had sold cigarettes at the stall adjoining. Miss Morris was accompanied by a tall young man; she stopped to greet Louie, and the young man walked slowly on. Myrtle asked Louie what she was doing now. Louie told her. "And you?" she said. 217

"Oh, I've gone back to my old trade," the girl said, nodding towards her retreating companion. "Artists' model. That's my present employer—Izzard."

"Who?" said Louie. The name seemed familiar.

"Billy Izzard. Know him?"

"No," said Louie. But she remembered now where she had heard the name.

"Jolly clever painter," said the model authoritatively. "Nice fellow too. Shall I call him?"

"Thanks, but I must be getting on," said Louie. "Good-bye."

"So long. Come and look me up some time, won't you? 25 Edith Grove."

"Thank you. Good-bye."

So that was Roy's friend! They had not gone down with the yacht that had lain under the hill at Rainham Parva. But she had only seen Mr. Izzard's back. For a moment, but only for a moment, she thought of Roy; then the sum-total of a long sequence of reveries returned to her again.

Or rather, the factors that made that total returned. In spite of her broodings late at night, when her letters were written and Jimmy's food prepared for the night, she was still unable to cast them up. Had she been asked to state her relation now to Mr. Jeffries her attempt would have been something like this:

"It's perfectly absurd, of course. There is no relation—nothing that can properly be called a relation. How can there be, with a man I don't see—haven't seen since that queer party? I don't even know where he is or what he's doing; he may be a commissionaire again for all I know." 218

"Yes, but," she now answered herself, as if it had been some form of a dialogue, "don't forget that other night, at Mortlake Road, after Kitty'd gone."

She did not forget that night. She had told herself that night that it was nonsense that she should love Mr. Jeffries. Again she answered that critical objector within herself.

"But it *is* nonsense after all! How *can* I? I suppose I mean that if things had been different I might have loved him. Moping about a man you never see is all very well for a schoolgirl for a week or two, but not for grown women, and mothers at that."

"Then you mean he's just the same to you as Buck and Chaff?" the dialogue continued, as she walked.

"All I mean is that he might have been more."

"Well, suppose you were to hear now that he'd broken off with Kitty, and—you know—that other were to happen?"

She did know what she meant by "that other." It was the most familiar of her thoughts. It was what in her heart she was stilly waiting for—to learn one day that Mr. Jeffries had broken off with Kitty and had become engaged to Evie Soames. And at that point she always tried to stop the dialogue. Beyond that point lay something that she vaguely apprehended might be horrible.

She had no definite reason for supposing this horrible thing to exist. The horror, indeed, was that it might exist, and to entertain morbid thoughts about something that merely might exist was neither pleasant nor wise. But at times she could not forget the promise she had once made to herself—that if anything unaccountable ever happened to a certain young man she would know in what quarter to look for the likely cause of it. And something had happened. Part of what had happened she had had from Miss Cora; "A lethal chamber—the nasty little sewer-rat!" Miss Cora had said; and it had happened on the eve of his wedding to Evie Soames. To commit suicide had been the only thing to do. 219

And of course he had committed suicide....

Then that second voice within her tried to speak again. "Remember," it said, "that this Mr. Jeffries, of whom you can't help thinking when all's said and done, had suffered innumerable insults from him—you yourself were dragged into one of them——"

"Quiet!" the other self commanded peremptorily.

"—and as far as that girl you hate's concerned—Evie Soames—if the reason was good enough for suicide it was good enough for the other thing."

"What other thing?" Louie, in spite of herself, could not help asking.

"Oh—*you* know!"

"Do you know what you're saying?" This was an attempt to browbeat the other Louie.

"Oh, perfectly well! *I* know myself—you—us—Louie Causton—better than you do! And I know that lion better! Have you forgotten? Don't you remember what you thought of him, that if he set his mind on a thing he'd get it sooner or later, one way or another? Don't you remember what he said —'I wonder if anybody's ever beaten who doesn't deserve to be?' They are dangerous men who believe that! And the way's clear for him now, isn't it? Of course it is! Why, suppose you hear, 220
first, that he's thrown Kitty Windus over; suppose you hear, next, that he's forging ahead in his business, whatever it is—you know he's as ambitious as Satan; then suppose you hear that he's engaged to Evie Soames—married to her. Suppose you hear all this?"

"Oh, anybody can make up an *a priori* tale like that!" the other scoffed.

"Perhaps they can; but what *is* a murder anyway? Whoever sees one committed? Don't they hang men on just such *a priori* tales, as you call it? Suppose that, rather than let him marry that girl ——"

"Oh, stop, stop!" Louie positively shrieked within herself.

She was white. This scene always turned her white. She quickened her pace, but her ghastly pallor remained unchanged. A hundred times she had argued it all before, and she knew the conclusion that would presently come.

It came, the conclusion. That portion of herself that always seemed resolved to convict Mr. Jeffries of a hideous thing spoke, as it were, softly, seductively.

"And what then, Louie? What then? Come, don't be afraid of yourself! You know it in your heart all the time! Roy—you remember—*you* had to make the love there; and you want to be *made* love to, not to make love. *You* didn't find Mr. Jeffries a butt and a laughing-stock, you know. You envied that little chit of a milliner's hand—envied her and hated her. And she hates you, and always will, because you caught her in the dark with that other creature. Yes, yes, I know you were overstrung at that time, and didn't see yourself very clearly, but look at the thing now—
you're calm now. When you saw his eyes, all full of perils and stratagems and deceits, all for her 221
sake, you know you longed to have a man do all that for *you*! And when he did that mad thing with Kitty Windus, you know you wanted a man who would go even to those lengths for *you*! And you know that when he throws her over—brutally, heartlessly, without conscience—you'll want a man who'll be just as brutal and heartless and conscienceless for *you*! You all want it! You all love a ruthless man! You know it's the men who are the merciful sex when sex comes into the question; you're only merciful when it doesn't—just as those stupid men are merciless about the abstractions you don't care a straw about!... So suppose—suppose——"

"Oh, stop!" Louie besought herself faintly.

"—suppose it turns out as I say! Won't you immediately love him a little more when poor Kitty's sent about her business? And won't you love him a little more still when you hear he's engaged to Evie Soames? And won't you, when you learn that he's been willing to go all lengths—all lengths —for love, love him past all mending? You will, you will, you know you will!" The cry rang out almost exultantly.

"But—but—those people—coroners' juries—are supposed to know all about these things."

"Coroners' juries!... Do you remember his eyes?..."

Beyond that point Louie never got. She usually rose quickly and went out to post the photographer's letters. There, then, were the elements of her sum. Sometimes some of them presented themselves, sometimes others; more and more she shrank from casting the total. And often, to shake off the hideous, fascinating obsession, she did the most trivial thing she could
think of—went to a drawer and overhauled her dresses, selecting the one she would wear at the 222
photographer's showroom on the morrow.

It was in her to turn from the thought of a possible murder to the shaking out of a crumpled dress.

But she never wore the oyster-grey at the showrooms in Bond Street. Nevertheless she shook it out frequently, putting it back into the drawer again.

That day, at the Molyneux Arms, Buck was alternately at his fondest and at his most tyrannical. The fondness was for Louie and the boy, the tyranny for everybody else. As Louie entered the little private parlour (she was not allowed to set foot in the rest of the premises) she heard loud crowings; they came from Jimmy, and were for the Pilgrim of Love who held him up at arm's-length in the air; but the next moment Buck was scolding a barmaid who had had the temerity to borrow the current number of *Modern Society* before Louie had seen it. "Not that I don't make 'em all read it," he said, "but at times and seasons, and in their proper places; what with all these Radicals and what not we don't want chayoss coming again! You bring it back this minute, miss! —'Oryn—thia my Belovèd!"

Buck kept his divided humour through tea; then there was another outburst. This time it was about a letter that had not been given to Louie immediately.

"And how do *you* know that it isn't important?" he broke out on his wife. "Not a word—not a word! I *know* it is important—all letters addressed so are important, mind, for the future! Those letters aren't about the butcher and baker and candlestick-maker, I'll have you know! Give it to her at once, and let Madermoselle hook up the back, or your next dress shall fasten down the front, I promise you!... What, little man! A granddad, eh? 'No re-(*h*)-est—but the gra-(*h*)-ave——'" 223

For all Louie was able to guess from the signature, her letter might have been from butcher, baker and candlestick-maker, all three; the name—"hers to serve, Frank Hickley"—was unknown to her. But the single other name that the letter contained was known. It was that of Kitty Windus. She was laid up somewhere in Vauxhall, and wanted to see her.

The next morning, in a shabby respectable street off the Vauxhall Bridge Road, Louie rang a bell beneath which, punched in a strip of aluminium, was the sign, "F. Hickley, Agent." F. Hickley himself opened the door. Later Louie learned that he was an agent for his wife's shopping, boot-cleaning and potato-peeling. Mrs. Hickley was Kitty's cousin, but the bit she had coming in was not enough to relieve her of the necessity of keeping a lodging-house. That it was a lodging-house Louie guessed from the number and variety of hats and coats that hung in the narrow yellow-painted hall. Mrs. Hickley appeared from somewhere below; Mr. Hickley, descending again, passed her on the stairs.

"Are you Miss Causton?" Mrs. Hickley asked.

"Yes. I've had a letter saying Miss Windus was here."

"Will you come up? Don't take too much notice of her, what she says, especially about tracts; Uncle Arthur's side's liable to it. This way."

"Is she ill?" Louie asked. 224

"Not to call ill. She'll go to Margate in a week or two, for the air, though Margate's too strong for me; Littlehampton's my favourite. And Bognor. Mind the stair-rod—I must tell Frank to fasten it down."

As Kitty had formerly found Louie, so Louie now found Kitty—in bed. Her muteness as long as Mrs. Hickley remained in the room seemed obstinate, *voulu*; the rapid speech into which she broke without preface when her cousin's step had ceased to sound on the stairs confirmed some vague impression of secretiveness. Louie was uneasy at the change in her.

"You're not to talk about it," Kitty said, the words falling one over the other; "that's what the doctor meant, though of course he didn't know what it was. And Mr. Folliott too—the Reverend Mr. Folliott of St. Peters. He gave me the address in Cliftonville, quite the best end of the town; there's such a lot in a good address, don't you think? You know Margate?"

"How are you, dear?" said Louie gently. "Yes, your cousin told me you were going away for a bit."

"Right away," said Kitty. "I can, you see; I haven't got to work if I don't want to; though I'm not rich, of course. Neither is Annie, but I don't like to see men doing the housework like Cousin Frank for all that. I've told Frank so again and again. '*Be* an agent,' I've said time after time; 'for typewriters, or mangles, or tea, or anything you like, but get out of the house; it isn't a man's place.' And it isn't.... You've heard?" she broke off suddenly to say.

She blinked at Louie. Her neck above her nightgown was hardly more substantial than that of a chicken; her hands seemed to have become as veined as a skeleton leaf. Louie took one of them. 225

"Always running errands and setting the table—it isn't a man's life," Kitty continued. "'What does agent *mean*?' I said to him. 'Pull yourself together and *make* it mean something, Frank!' I said. 'You're not very big, but you're strong, and you've got your wits about you,' I said.... You've heard?" she demanded once more.

"Well, tell me how you are," said Louie, patting the thin hand soothingly.

"But have you heard the news? Glad tidings for all. 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest'—that's what we all want—rest; though why they should print 'Come' in red and 'unto' in green and 'Me' in purple, and all the letters like twigs, I'm sure I can't tell you, my dear. And always Oxford frames. I must ask Mr. Folliott. 'Though your sins be as crimson——'"

"You haven't asked how my little boy is, Kitty," said Louie.

"'Suffer the little children, and forbid them not'—how is he?"

But she did not wait for an answer. She was off again—the doctor, the Reverend Mr. Folliott, her approaching visit to Margate. And always she returned to the indignity of a man's doing women's work about the house. It was in this connection that she suddenly mentioned, in a way that gave Louie a slight start, the name of Mr. Jeffries.

"I will at least say that for him," she prattled; "I shouldn't have got sick of the sight of him; out of the house at half-past nine he'd have been, and that would have been the end of him till six 226
o'clock; not always bumping into you like Frank. I suppose you know Miss Levey's there too, at his Company? He's getting on there like anything. So's Mr. Mackie; you remember Mr. Mackie? He takes the auction himself now on Mondays and Thursdays; in Oxford Street; everybody stops as they walk past; he's a caution, is Mr. Mackie, I can tell you! But of course Jeff"—here she became mysterious, and nodded once or twice—"Jeff's on the way up—up. It's a different class of work from Mr. Mackie's; better, as you might say; he's in the Confidential Exchange Department, Miriam says——"

"How is Miss Levey?" Louie asked, at a loss what else to say.

"Oh, in the pink—but the soul's the chief thing; what shall it profit a man; and I don't know whether her soul's in the pink. Do you always *hold* with the Church of England, Louie?" she asked earnestly.

There was nothing to be made of her. She ran on weakly, irresponsibly, from trifle to trifle, and it was at Louie's own risk that she gave her talk any significance at all.... Suddenly she insisted that she herself had broken the engagement, not he. She spoke of his place in the Company—it was the Freight and Ballast Company; it appeared to be a "permanency." He was getting on—on; *he* wouldn't polish brasses and take the lodgers' boots to be mended!... As she talked, Louie looked round the poor, neat little bedroom. It had framed texts and a picture of a lady shipwrecked in a nightgown; this was entitled "Simply to Thy Cross I cling." There was a good deal of muslin about, tied back with flyblown bows. 227

But suddenly Kitty seemed to remember something. Louie was once more gently patting the hand on the counterpane when she gave a quick little clutch and sat up.

"They wrote to you to come, didn't they?" she asked, looking hard at Louie.

"Yes, dear. I'd have come sooner if I'd known. The letter was sent on from Mortlake Road. I came as soon as I got it."

"That's all right," said Kitty, nodding mysteriously again. "I want to talk to you. Is the door shut?"

"Yes; but don't talk. Let me talk to you instead."

"No; there's something I want to say, and I shall forget it if I don't say it now.... You heard about it, didn't you? I don't mean the glad tidings for all——"

"Lie down, dear." (Kitty was squatting up in bed.) "Tell me the next time I come. I'll come again."

"No, I must tell you now. Though Jeff's sins be as scarlet. Of course you heard about Archie?"

"Hush."

"Of course you'd be down on him; quite right; so was Jeff. Jeff didn't half give him a talking to, I can tell you! 'Oh, I'll give him a dressing down,' he said; he was pretending it wasn't much, so as not to alarm me; but *I* know him! 'Miss Causton and me?' he said. 'What a ridiculous idea!' And he made Archie apologise before the whole school. And now Archie's gone, and they said it was suicide; but what I can't understand is about Jeff's having that black eye, that very day. He'd fallen when he was drunk, he said, but Jeff never got drunk. He said he tripped on the step; but he never *got* drunk, if you understand what I mean. Wine is a mocker, isn't it, Louie? But I'm sure 228
Jeff wasn't drunk. He isn't that kind of man."

Louie herself wondered why she should interpose as quickly and peremptorily as she did. She wondered, too, why she should do so in the words she used and in a voice so thin and harsh.

"Oh—of *course* he was drunk! My father keeps a public-house, so I ought to know. And they often get black eyes when they're drunk. Let's talk about something else."

"Well," said Kitty, with her head on one side, "a public-house is as paying a business as there is, especially in a poor neighbourhood. But I'd rather have my little bit in tramways. People ought to be careful how they invest their money; dividends aren't everything; what shall it profit a man? So you think I needn't worry about Jeff's black eye?"

All at once Louie felt an almost hysterical need to turn Kitty's weak wanderings into another direction—any other direction. Glibly she began to improvise.

"It's horrid," she said, her voice a little raised. "I've seen them at my father's. They get drunk, and fall, and then they get black eyes quite easily. And," she ran on regardlessly, "they knock themselves about fearfully! I saw a man in the Harrow Road one night——"

Feverishly she extemporised. To something she had once seen from the top of a bus she gave colour and circumstance. Kitty was impressed. "Dear me!" she said.

Then, when the danger, whatever it was, seemed to be averted, Louie turned, though not much

more calmly, to Margate. Kitty was perfectly docile; Margate or that dangerous other were all the same to her. Louie had never been to Margate, but she compared Margate with other places— 229
Bournemouth, Ilfracombe, Scarboro.

"I should like to go to Scarboro," Kitty mused—"Harrogate too—Harrogate's tremendously toney, isn't it?"

"Very; all hotels and kursaals and pump rooms and things," averred Louie, who had never been to Harrogate either.

Then, ten minutes later, she rose. She said good-bye. But even as she did so she received another start. Kitty had suddenly called in a sharp, loud voice.

"Was that Annie at the door?"

"No," said Louie, her nerves all on edge. "There's nobody."

"Open the door and look!"

Louie did so. There was nobody. She returned to the bed again. Kitty was once more squatting up. She still spoke sharply.

"It's all very well to be so cocksure," she said, "but if Annie was to guess, or Miriam Levey or any of them, it would be all U P, I can tell you! Or Evie Soames either! I only told you because you're different and can hold your tongue! The tongue is a little member, so the best thing people can do is to shut up, you take my tip! And *I* broke it off, mind you! There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, without girls making themselves cheap, and if he ever wants to know I'll tell him straight—no drunks and black eyes for me! Not that I don't forgive my enemies; I'm as good at that as the next one; but when I'm engaged again it'll be to somebody who's TT absolutely, though he does clean the knives!" Then, dropping her voice again, she said equably: "Good-bye, 230
dear—you will come again, won't you? I sha'n't be going for a fortnight—the rooms aren't at liberty yet—there isn't a sea view, but it isn't a minute from the Ramsgate tram—you must come and stay with me——"

Louie left her. Downstairs in the hall she had a few words with Kitty's cousin. She asked when the engagement with Mr. Jeffries had been broken off, and was told a year ago. Part of the time since then Kitty had spent with another cousin, Alf Windus, who lived in Kilburn and played the first fiddle at the Metropolitan in Edgware Road; part she had spent at Alf's sister-in-law's at Wealdstone; and for the rest of the time she had been at the Hickleys'. She was only a little flighty at times, and Mrs. Hickley was too busy, what with breakfasts at different hours and some liking one thing and some another, to pay much attention to her. She would have taken her for nothing if she could, but life was a struggle and business was business, and Mrs. Hickley had been lucky enough to let her room for the time she would be away at Margate. If Kitty really had anything to keep from her cousin, apparently (Louie concluded) she had kept it. Probably Kitty's condition (Mrs. Hickley added) was a result of the shock of Archie Merridew's suicide, coinciding with her rupture with Mr. Jeffries. Beyond that Mrs. Hickley minded her own business—plenty, too,——

"Thank you for coming," she said, opening the door for Louie.

"I shall come again if I may," Louie replied.

Already she knew that she would go again—must go again—though it was only when she had left the house behind her that she began to ask herself why. Then followed another dialogue. The critical Louie began it. 231

"Well, what did I tell you? His engagement's off, and he's getting on in his business. I'm right so far, eh?"

"Too right," the other Louie muttered. "Let it rest."

"Will it let you rest—that's the question! Well, what do you want next—his engagement to Evie Soames?"

"I don't want anything. I've got my boy and my living to earn. That fills my life."

"Then why are you going to see Kitty again? Come, don't shirk it. You know why you're going. You're going to——"

"I'm not!"

"You're going to protect him! If that poor creature thinks she guesses, you're going to tell her the notion's perfectly absurd! You're going to lie to her! If she has weak fancies, you're going to see that they're just as wide of the truth as they can be. Do you still deny what the truth is? After whatever the tale is he's been telling about drunkenness and a black eye? *Is* he that kind of man? *Isn't* that just as likely as not to be one of his blinds? A man has to be cunning, you know, to hoodwink a coroner's jury, but somehow he seems to have done it."

"I don't know anything about it."

"You mean you believe he hasn't done it? Then why are you going to see Kitty again? Oh, don't pretend to me! I tell you you're going to protect him. And why are you going to protect him? (Ah,

I didn't think of that before, but I see it now!) You'll love him a little more still just for that! You'll love him because you have his safety in your hands. You'll keep it in your hands. Even if you have to take Kitty to live with you, so that you can watch her every spare moment, you'll take care she never, never knows. You're planning it now. You're going to have a right in that man no other woman on earth has, Evie Soames or anybody else. And you're going to take him from Evie Soames too, if you can!" 232

The other attempted irony. "What, me? With my story?"

"You only regret your story because it stands now in your way of getting him! Would you marry Roy now even if you could gain a kingdom by it? Why, you wouldn't before, let alone now! What are you going to see Kitty again for—to-morrow? We shall see! Your nerves are all a-jump at this moment; you don't feel it safe to leave here even for a few hours! And another thing. Miriam Levey seems to be at his place, wherever it is, and you're positively trembling about *that*! While you're trying to worm things out of Kitty on the one side, she'll be at the other—*you* know what she is! So the first thing you'll do will be to find out exactly what Kitty's got into her head."

But here the normal Louie temporarily triumphed. "What a tale you're making up!" she laughed. "These things simply do not happen. Actually, you're trying to force it on me that I love a man simply because he's committed a——"

"Not simply because——"

"Well, that I'm in love with a man who has committed one. Tell that to the world, and see how you're laughed at!... Oh no, it's too much. People don't do it, especially when it's guesswork, pure and simple——"

So she triumphed. The other Louie held her peace.

But for all that she went to see Kitty again on the morrow. 233

II

It was an error of judgment that caused Louie to leave the photographer's in Bond Street. The money she owed to Buck and Chaff was on her mind; she saw that Richenda Earle had been right; she was not yet out in the open. She sought to diminish her indebtedness by finding a better-paid post.

The opportunity presented itself. She obtained, at a salary of three pounds a week, the coveted secretaryship. Never mind to whom she became secretary; he is now a renowned author; and Louie was with him for just a fortnight. At the end of that time he offered to double her salary. Louie's answer was to walk immediately out of his house. She had now no job at all.

The story of the pinch shall be passed over lightly. The boy did not feel it; it was she who tightened her belt. Promising herself that it was for the last time, she borrowed of Buck, and then removed to Edith Grove, taking two small rooms in the same house as Myrtle Morris, the model. But Myrtle had gone for the Christmas season into pantomime, and as Louie was out all day, and asleep when Myrtle returned at night, she saw little of her. She would have gone into pantomime too, but she was too late, and still hoped for something better. Of necessity Céleste remained with her; Céleste kept the place going with her needle. This was at the beginning of 1898. February found her again in a cash-desk, this time at Slater's. The desk had a mirrored panel in the front of it that extended from the narrow counter to the floor, and at first Louie wondered why clerks and shop-assistants put down their money, stood back from the desk, and grinned. 234 Then one day, when somebody else was inside the box, she noticed the illusion. The head and shoulders of the girl in the cage appeared to be continued downwards by the trousers of a man. As she could not afford to throw up her job, she continued to bear the grins disdainfully. After her day's work she acquired from Céleste the art of crochet. Her mats and table-centres and borders for teacloths went in with Céleste's own work.

Her improved French enabled her to pass, in April, from the cash-desk at Slater's to one at a foreign restaurant in Soho. She still lived in Edith Grove. For several weeks that summer she was again at Earls Court, but with the reopening of the theatres she obtained a place in the ladies' cloakroom at His Majesty's. One night she helped Miss Elwell, the daughter of Sir James Elwell of the Treasury, off with her cloak. She was unrecognised. She wondered how B. Minor was getting on.

She was still at His Majesty's at Christmas 1898; but the New Year saw her at still another place —a Ladies' Turkish Baths, in St. James's. Buck, angry and disapproving of the whole course of her life, liked this least of all; massage somehow brought it home to him. But there was a worse shock still in store for Buck. In the spring of '99 Louie became an artist's model.

Myrtle Morris introduced her to the profession and to Roy's friend, Billy Izzard, at the same time. This also was in Edith Grove. Billy Izzard, whose large, boyish face and loose, shambling figure somehow gave Louie the impression that he had either grown too quickly or else not yet filled out, was telling Miss Morris, with a candour entirely disarming, that for some purpose or other her own form was no good at all; and Miss Morris asked him why he didn't try the Models' Club. 235 He snorted.

"Try it? I have tried it; tried everything. Fact of the matter is, it's like going to a Registry Office for servants; you find the rich people have snapped up all the best before they get there. Old Henson gets 'em. He's got the very girl I want; Miss Gale; but I can't pay what Henson pays. And the rest of you are like that egg—good in parts."

Louie wondered whether Billy had ever heard her name before; she found a way of making sure. The talk turned to holiday-places for the coming summer, and Louie contrived to mention the Somerset coast and the Bristol Channel. The unsuspecting Billy told her that he had once been yachting there with a fellow and had had a smash-up. It was amusing. According to Billy, the other fellow had rather fancied himself as a patcher-up of broken centre-boards and suchlike, had put in at some place or other, and had said he'd made the centre-board all right; and he'd come pretty near drowning the pair of them off a place called Combe Martin. Luckily they'd been spied by the coastguard, and a boat had been put out to them. "Rottenest piece of navigation in England," Billy grumbled on; "there's a place called the Boiling Pot——" He described it....

Louie felt a little gush of gratitude towards Roy. He had not chattered. But of course he would not——

She did not offer at once to sit to Billy; it was a fortnight later that she screwed up her courage to do so. During that time she thought the matter out. Perhaps the stark simplicity of the thing attracted her. No acquirement she was ever likely to possess would greatly improve her 236
circumstances; it would probably be the same to the end of the chapter—cash-desk, waitress, Earls Court—Earls Court, mannequin, and a private secretaryship with an offer of double wages. At two colleges she had learned little or nothing; she lacked application; but here was something that quietly brushed acquirements aside—something that went flagrantly by favour. It was femininity reduced to its simplest statement. She had no fear of Billy Izzard. She guessed that to him she would be little more than a more complex whitewashed cube or cone or pyramid.

She did not even colour when she made her proposal to him....

"But I expect you'll go off to old Henson or some other swell presently," he sighed, as she stood before him....

And of course Chaff, barring her face that was best suited with a large shady hat, had given her her testimonial long before.

Buck was furious. The original, genuine Pilgrim of Love had reason enough to know what happened in studios. Young women of high birth (in Louie's case it would probably be a young man) began to take their lunches there, and one day burst into jealous unhappy tears, and after that the Pilgrimage began. But Louie only laughed at him. She reminded him that she had reason to regard herself as a pilgrim too. At that Buck looked hard at her.

"Little woman," he said slowly, "d'you mean—that there is somebody?" Louie laughed again, but 237
more consciously.

"Once or twice lately," Buck continued, still looking hard at her, "I've wondered whether there might be——"

"How can there be, daddy?"

"Well, the other isn't befitting," said Buck, shaking his head and returning to the original point.

"My daddy did it."

"Ah, men's different. For high ladies it—it isn't befitting."

"I'm not a young girl, daddy."

"No." Buck sighed. If he had only known her when she was a young girl! But the whims of the Scarisbricks were still the Scarisbricks' whims, and as such above his judgment. "But I want to see this Mr. Izzard," he added grimly.

"That you certainly sha'n't," Louie replied promptly. "Fancy your taking me round everywhere I go!"

"Everywhere?" Buck repeated, alarmed anew.

"Of course. If it's a business it's a business. Why, Mr. Izzard alone would be—dreadful! It's no good, daddy; you can't change my mind."

He saw that he could not, but he still tried. It only delayed a little her carrying of her point. In the end—well, she was her mother's daughter. There was no more to be said.

So she began to make the round of the Chelsea studios, and presently moved, with Céleste and the boy, to more comfortable quarters in Lavender Hill, Clapham Junction. This took her farther from her work in Chelsea, but brought her nearer to the Lambeth and Westminster Schools of Art, where also she obtained sittings, sometimes during the day, sometimes in the evenings also. 238
She sat for Billy when Billy could afford to pay her. "No, no—no tick, Billy," she told him once; "I don't do this for amusement." Of the boy Billy knew nothing.... Buck, still strongly averse from the whole proceeding, at first refused to hear her gossip of the day's work; but, as his silence did not alter matters, little by little he began to come round. Soon they exchanged experiences quite freely. He told her what Sopley had said about his deltoid, Henson about his thigh. "You vain old

daddy!" she said, stroking his cheek, "I believe for two pins you'd do it again!" She took a pleasure in fondly shocking him in the same sort. Sometimes he mused long. You will admit that it was something to muse over. And so—well, so Louie, throwing acquirements aside with her clothes, became, by virtue of her peculiar commodity, economically emancipated. As female models, women are eminently better than men.

She did fairly well at it. So well did she do that from the three rooms in Lavender Hill (the third one Céleste's) piece by piece her landlady's furniture began to disappear. Her own took its place. She intended, when she had enough of her own, to save the difference in rent between furnished and unfurnished quarters by taking a small flat. So her two chests of drawers and her wardrobe were her own; so were much of her cutlery and bed and table linen; and so, of course, were Jimmy's various paraphernalia. But she was not ready to leave yet. The summer of 1900, she thought, would be early enough.

And in one particular at least she was now able to hold up her head. She still owed money both to Buck and Chaff, but she knew as much about the struggle for a livelihood as Richenda Earle 239
herself. And she had not grizzled. Life had not knocked her out. She was her father's daughter after all.

And yet, once more, she felt herself her mother's daughter too. The reason, which was not very far to seek, was this:

The earlier stages of that furtive romance that in the end had left her former husband no Rest but the Grave were known only to Mrs. Chaffinger herself. Henson had not guessed them; Lord Moone had seen only the resultant scandal of them. But Louie understood a little now. She could at least guess what had happened to her mother between her first setting eyes on the splendid Buck and that final petulant, pathetic cry: "Oh, that I should have to beg a man to marry me!" By sympathy she was able now to divine the sighs, the half-acknowledged longings, the half-shamed daydreams, the revulsions, the sinkings back again. For Louie now knew something of these things within herself.

Not that there was not harder stuff in Louie. There was. There was, for example, that sense of proportion which is humour. How could her thoughts of Mr. Jeffries not be rather preposterous? She found it difficult sometimes to remember even his personal appearance; she had well-nigh forgotten his voice; many idle repetitions had dulled the memory of that odd little thrill she had felt when her hand had lain in his. True, she remembered these things in a way. She remembered the tawny bulk of him, the lion's eyes, the gloss of his hair, the modeless fashion of his speech; but these were mere noted facts, no more hers than everybody else's. Yet what (she asked herself) had become of her sense of humour that she should want something of him that nobody 240
else had? What had happened to her sense of proportion that she did not forget him as she had forgotten scores of people of whom she had seen far, far more? And how had it come about that, for one thought she cast on Roy, Mr. Jeffries had twenty? And why this new and curious understanding of her mother?

She asked herself these questions behind the grilles of her cash-desks, behind the counters of her Earls Court stalls, posing or crocheting on her model thrones, riding backwards and forwards to her sittings or what not on the tops of omnibuses. Usually she answered herself more or less like this:

"It looks very much as if I was making of him what he seems to have made of that Soames girl—a sort of *idée fixe*; if I were to fall really in love now, I suppose I shouldn't think any more about him. Luckily it doesn't matter; it's my own affair. Good gracious, suppose he knew! He'd think me as imbecile as I am!—There I go again!" (This probably, some minutes later.) "Suppose I *had* met him earlier, and things *had* been different—what about it? What's the good of remembering all that now? Well, it puts the time on down this beastly Kennington Lane.... Thank goodness I'm not likely to come across him; I can't help thinking something would happen if I did.... Poor mother!" she usually ended inconsequentially, "I suppose she'd be about my age. I'm turned thirty—thirty-one in fact—shall have to stop counting soon. Time you stopped counting when it occurs to you that your mother had dreams just as silly as yours——"

And so, whether this Mr. Jeffries meant much or little to her, he did not mean so much but that 241
any trivial near occurrence—a cold of young Jimmy's, a cold of her own that prevented her from sitting for a day or two, or a fall in the crochet-market—put Mr. Jeffries and the wild and tangled ideas that seemed to cloak his image temporarily quite out of her thoughts.

When early in the year 1900 she got regular sittings for a time with an artist who lived in St. John's Wood, she never went up or down Tottenham Court Road in the Victoria bus without half expecting to run across Evie Soames, who lived in Woburn Place. Because she did not meet her, she concluded that very likely she lived there no longer. But, late on a windy afternoon in March, at about the time when the street lamps were being lighted, she did meet her.

It was opposite the Adam and Eve, in Euston Road, and on either of the two women's parts there was a curious momentary hesitation. If Evie Soames still lived in Woburn Place and was going home, the first bus that came would do for her, and Louie had already seen her glance as it approached; but as it happened, that bus was the Victoria bus for which Louie herself was waiting. Louie spoke; it seemed to her that not to speak would be to apologise, by silence, for that episode in her career that had brought Kitty Windus in haste to the Nursing Home in Mortlake

Road. A large parcel she was carrying gave her an excuse not to shake hands.

"How do you do?" she said.

Something, she could not have told what, had instantly drawn her eyes to the girl's attire. Evie Soames was wearing a black jacket and black fur cap, but the wind, turning the jacket aside, showed the narrow black and white stripes of the blouse beneath. 242

"Oh—fancy meeting you!" Evie said, turning her dark eyes as if she had only that moment seen Louie. There was something in her manner that Louie interpreted as meaning, "Very well, if I've got to be cordial I'll *be* cordial!" "Are you going by this bus?" she added.

"Yes."

"Oh! Where are you living now—Putney?"

It may be that Louie met any slight the last word might have conveyed half-way and more. She replied, a little shortly: "No, Lavender Hill; I change at Victoria. After you——"

"Oh no—after you!"

Louie ascended; they couldn't stand on the kerb discussing points of precedence. "Let's go in front," Evie said, "and then men won't smoke on us," and they settled down.

"Well," Evie said, adjusting the apron, "and how are *you*?"

"Thank you," said Louie, "perfectly well."

"There's room for your parcel here. Such ages since we met! Let me see, when was it?"

They discussed when it was, and then, "And have you seen Kitty Windus lately?" Evie asked.

Since her first visit to the Hickleys' Louie had seen Kitty perhaps half-a-dozen times in all, not oftener. Kitty had been to Margate, thence to Whetstone, and after that to Alf Windus the violinist's. Louie had simply not been able to see her oftener; she had had far too much to do. And, after all, nothing (the nothing of Louie's fears and fancies) seemed to have happened. Except to herself (Louie guessed) Kitty made no mysterious allusions to black eyes. She was merely puzzled, pathetic, harmless. She had not that perilous thing, a preconceived theory into which events had a fulfilling way of dropping of themselves. So Louie replied to Evie Soames in a tone as casual as her own: 243

"Oh yes, I've seen her several times. Of course you heard that her engagement to Mr. Jeffries was broken off?"

"Oh yes," said Evie, looking straight in front of her.

"Have you seen her, then?"

"Oh no. But of course Mr. Jeffries himself would know, wouldn't he?—that is, if you call it breaking off when a person just disappears without saying where she is or anything about it. Don't bother to unbutton; I have some pennies——"

But Louie also had pennies. "Any more fares?" the conductor called, and then went downstairs again. The two women fell into a silence. The early lamplight came and went on their faces as the bus jogged on.

Presently the silence seemed to have taken almost the character of a contest as to who should speak next, with either resolved that it should not be herself. Louie knew perfectly well what was the matter. Miss Soames might speak glancingly of Mortlake Road and offer to pay her bus fares, but really she hated Louie because of Louie's discovery in the old ledger-room on that examination day that now seemed so long ago. The girl seemed to be still in some sort of half mourning—but Louie did not want to think much of that and all that it might mean. Rather desperately, she strove to forget that she had ever had a theory about what might have driven Evie Soames into black and of what might happen when she went into colours again. She must, she told herself sharply, have a hideous mind ever to have thought these things. Indeed, she was so short with herself about it that, relinquishing the contest of silence, she again made the small immediate thing banish the large shadowy one behind. 244

"Do you ever see Miriam Levey nowadays?" she asked suddenly.

"No," Evie replied. At any rate she had not been the first to speak.

"Oh? But aren't she and Mr. Jeffries at the same place now?"

"Yes, I believe they are—in fact, I know they are. I suppose Kitty told you?"

"Yes."

"Poor Kitty! But let me see: was Miriam at the office when Kitty came to Mortlake Road? I thought it was after that she went."

"I've seen Kitty more than once," said Louie, compressing her lips. The bus was slowing down opposite the Oxford.

"Ah, yes, you said so. Well, remember me to her when you see her again, won't you? I get down

here. I hope you'll get your parcel home all right; it's rather a large one, isn't it? Good-bye."

As Evie Soames's figure was lost in the crowd that jostled in the lights of the Horse Shoe Louie did not look round. She was too angry. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "the insupportable little creature! Why, I never looked at one of my mother's housemaids so! *De haut en bas*—her to me! But I did catch you that day, Miss Polly Ross, and you know it!" 245

But as the bus moved southwards again, she was trying once more to forget that white stripe in Evie Soames's dress. She did not want to think that anything had suddenly seemed to come a stride nearer. And she would now rather not have been told, what apparently was the fact, that, whether frequently or not, Evie Soames did see Mr. Jeffries.

The parcel she was taking home contained a dress; she had been sitting in it; but it was not the oyster-grey. The old oyster-grey, too, served to bring her nearer to her mother and that weak flicker of romance long ago in Henson's studio. Not for worlds would she have had Céleste see the idiotic looks she sometimes gave that dress in which she had danced with Mr. Jeffries. And sometimes she would suddenly toss it aside, roughly, anyhow. She was not seventeen (she would tell herself), to moon over a flower a man had given her or a dance programme on which he had scrawled his name. She was a woman of turned thirty-one (she rubbed it in), with her living to earn and an illegitimate son to provide for.... But sometimes she was very wistful too. She had never (she sighed) really been a girl of seventeen at all; looking back, she saw that she had missed that. She blamed nobody; no doubt she had been unruly, ill-conditioned, unmanageable; still, she had missed that. The thought always sent her off into her reveries again; and then, how differently, how much more admirably, she was able to plan everything to herself! Over and over again she built it all up, unbuilt it again, rearranged it, played with it. Had she, as a girl of seventeen, met Mr. Jeffries—had this circumstance been different, that particular not been the same—had she nursed no grudge against her mother—had it been Mr. Jeffries, not Roy, with 246 whom she had kicked her long legs during the vacations at Mallard Bois—had she, in a word, had the arranging of the world herself and the choosing of the places she and he were to occupy in it ——

"Bosh!" she usually cut herself abruptly off. "I shall be afraid of turning a corner soon for fear of walking into the gentleman! What shall I take in for supper?"

She did not know yet—indeed it was only some months later that she learned it, but it is set down here—that already, at a Langham Exhibition, Billy Izzard had one day seen a big stranger standing before one of his sketches, had gone up and spoken to him, and had liked the fellow—had liked his hewn slab of a face with the yellow eyes in it so much that presently, having an old sketch he was never likely to sell, he had given it to him. But Billy would at any time rather give away a sketch to somebody he liked than sell one to somebody he didn't like, and he still set, moreover, less than their real value on those paintings of flowers that he "knocked off" in a couple of keen and nervous hours. One of these sketches, by the way, Louie herself coveted—a straggle of violets, a few white ones among them, in a lustre bowl; and she offered a certain number of sittings in exchange for it—another elementary example of the transaction in kind. But Billy shook his head. He wanted that for a wedding present for a fellow, he said. He'd give Louie another some time—after he'd found another studio. He was sick of Chelsea; when a fellow got to know the cracks in the flagstones it was time he moved. He thought of going up north somewhere, Camden Town or Hampstead or St. John's Wood—better air. So Louie could make up 247 her mind to the bus-rides, or else move too. He wasn't going to let Henson get hold of her.

But Louie still delayed to move from Lavender Hill.

III

Louie's adventures, as she continued to sit, would fill a book: but not this book. Her sittings were the accidents of her life; her real life she reckoned from Sunday to Sunday. Sundays were the blest days she devoted to Jimmy.

He was now nearly four years old, and (as Céleste continued delightedly to exult) "existed" and "manifested" indeed. Louie herself gave him her bath before she set out of a morning; she did so in a waterproof and little else—why, the splashed condition of the wall-paper in the poky little bathroom explained. It was the same old waterproof she had worn at Rainham Parva. Buck's admiration of the boy's chest and limbs was merely fatuous; he himself was teaching him to swim at the Public Baths. He had announced to Louie, with a great show of harshness, that the money she was fool enough to refuse, the boy would have the benefit of; that at least was something she couldn't prevent, he informed her, and though Louie scolded fondly back, it was a weight off her mind. Chaff, the other grandfather, came occasionally on Sundays; he came, for example, on the Sunday after the opening of the Royal Academy. He brought a catalogue with him, and, taking Louie into a corner, desired her to mark the numbers for which she had sat. Whether the poor old fellow meditated the buying of them all up, or what else, there was no telling. Her sittings, too, 248 were "just like Mops." Perhaps that was more than some of the pictures were.

But it is not true, as has been reported, that for Henson's last picture, "Resurgam," Buck Causton and his daughter posed together. Buck never posed after his first marriage. Louie only posed for Henson once, and that was in wet drapery. She caught a pretty cold in consequence. She exulted

in that cold; it gave her three whole days with little Jimmy. They played with tops and balls and soldiers on the floor. The boy wanted an ensign's uniform, like that of the fourth Lord Moone in the miniature, and Chaff bought him a dragoon's helmet and cuirass. Buck laughed because the cuirass was already too small; and then he sighed. Perhaps he remembered the suit of armour of Big Hugo at Mallard Bois.

Well, if a little money was all that was necessary, the boy could be put into the army by-an-by.

And so things might have gone on had they been destined to do so; but into Louie's life of busy sitting and foolish dreaming and Sunday's rompings with her boy, there came a disruptive force. Kitty Windus brought it on a Sunday morning in early June.

Céleste was reading a story to Jimmy when she walked in; Louie was putting the last touches to a piece of crochet; and all three were awaiting Buck's arrival with the trap—he was going to take them to Hampton Court. She entered unannounced, and, to Louie's way of thinking, would have been better in bed. Her face seemed unusually small and thin; she spoke in a high, painful voice.

"Louie, I want to see you—quick——"

It was as if Louie too caught an instant alarm. Hurriedly she dropped her just-finished crochet and rose. 249

"What's the matter?" she asked quickly. "Come into my bedroom."

In the quite prettily furnished little bedroom Kitty began to walk rapidly to and fro. Once or twice she turned her looks to the brown-papered walls, as if she expected to find texts there; for the rest the blinking little eyes roved ceaselessly at about knee-height from the floor. Then she stopped before Louie.

"They're getting married in a fortnight," she cried harshly, accusingly.

There is no need for Louie to ask who, nor did she know what instinct again, as before, bade her take up a definite attitude without a moment's delay. She only felt in her very bones that delay would be perilous, and that not the shade of an expression must cross her face that was not natural and unsurprised.

"Yes, of course; didn't you know?" she said quietly. "Mr. Jeffries and Evie Soames, you mean?"

Again Kitty made that painful little sound—*à bouche fermée*. "You knew?" she cried.

A simple lie would not have availed; this was so obvious that Louie lied deliberately, circumstantially and at length.

"Yes, of course I knew. Of course I did. Do you mean to say you didn't? I made certain you did; I was going to write to you. In about a fortnight, isn't it? I'm—I'm giving them a wedding present; it's—it's that piece of crochet you saw me doing. It isn't much, but these things don't go by value; it's the intention. What are you going to give them?"

She almost blushed for the lameness of it. As a matter of fact, she had intended that piece of crochet for the new flat, when she should take it; but to soothe Kitty now was of more importance than crochet for new flats. She watched her covertly, anxiously. 250

"How did you know?" Kitty flashed out, again stopping in her walk.

"Sit down, dear; sit on the edge of my bed; I'm sure you're tired. How did I know? Why, I saw Evie herself. I saw her on a bus one day in Tottenham Court Road. It was near the Adam and Eve. And—I say, Kitty"—dropping her voice confidentially, she made an appeal to Kitty's hunger for gossip—anything for a diversion—"I doubt if they'll have too much to live on—it takes a tidy bit to get married on—and I don't suppose she has any shares to sell."

But Kitty did not seem to hear. She flashed out again.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"My *dear*! I made sure you'd heard it from Miriam Levey. And I wasn't sure where you were; you move about so, you know. I wonder what Miriam will give them! Something far more expensive than mine, I expect. And you ought to give them something too, Kitty. What's done's done, you know, and after all, lots of engagements are——"

But once more Kitty flashed out. "Oh, *I* shall give him a bottle of arnica, or whatever it is, for black eyes!"

Louie laughed almost hysterically at the joke. The tension was getting almost too much for her. "Oh, come, he isn't a wife-beater yet!" she protested.

"But he will be, that man!" Kitty cried aloud with frightening vehemence. "He'd do anything—anything—much he cares! Did you know I got lost the other night? In Lincolns Inn Fields; policemen coming up to me, if you please, and asking me where I lived! Much he cares! I believe it was her all the time—he never wanted me at all, and as soon as Archie's out of the way he goes and marries her! Miriam Levey herself says she can't help thinking it's funny—and I can't think what *your* game is either, to be going on as if it wasn't! I'll tell you what *I* think, if you want to know——" 251

"Hush, hush, hush!" came from Louie. She had her arms about Kitty. "Perhaps you're right, dear; he was cruel to you! And"—she rushed into another extemporisation—"I don't know that I would give him a present, after all. If one can't forgive an injury one can't, and it's no good pretending. He did wrong you, and perhaps he oughtn't to be let off, after all. I won't send him one either."

She said it because it was better to confine Kitty to her own wrongs than to allow her to approach a number of frightening unknown possibilities that began with black eyes. And apparently she succeeded. Kitty fell back on her own injury, and became a little calmer.

"Oh," she said cunningly, "but you'd have to send yours, and Miriam Levey'd have to send hers too—then, don't you see, I should be the only one who didn't, and he'd notice it! I just hope he does notice it. Serve him right. I wasn't as hard up for a fellow as all that—I carried on with a fellow at that breaking-up party. I did—you ask Mr. Mackie.... You *do* think Jeff never intended to marry me at all, don't you, Louie?" She peered curiously at Louie.

Well, better that, Louie thought. "I don't think he meant to for a single moment," she replied.

"Oh, the *rotter*. Come on, let's send your present now. We'll show him!..." 252

She was quite eager about it; but Louie kept her in the bedroom a little longer. Kitty began to speak of texts again. Again she wondered why "Come" was written in green and "Unto" in red and "Me" in purple, and why all texts had Oxford frames. "You haven't any, I see," she said, glancing again round the brown-papered walls. "You ought to have 'Remember thy Creator,' you know, Louie; it always reminds you, you see. What's this?"

It was one of Billy Izzard's etchings. Kitty examined it with her head a little on one side.

"It's very nice, whatever it is," she conceded; "but where's the other one? I always think pictures look better in pairs. But you can get odd ones cheap sometimes; Mr. Mackie had a great sale of Art Engravings one day in one of those Oxford Street places—you can hear his voice right across the street—and *he* said they were cheap because they weren't pairs, but they'd do splendidly for the middle of anywhere, like over a mantelpiece. And what a nice looking-glass! Really, you're quite comfortable here!"

She seemed to have forgotten all about Mr. Jeffries again. She walked round Louie's bedroom, bestowing encomiums and preening herself on her own pound a week.

At midday Buck came, but Louie did not join the party; she sent Céleste and Jimmy, and herself stayed with Kitty. She hoped Kitty would not stay long; she wanted to lie down and think—think. Nor did Kitty stay very long; but before she went she returned to the subject of the crochet. She wanted the article—it was a teacloth—sent immediately; she would run out and post it herself, she said; and *then*, when he got presents from Miriam and Louie and none from herself, *that* would be rather a nasty one for Mr. Jeffries! 253

"Do pack it up. *I'll* show him I'm not to be trampled on like the dirt under his feet!" she persisted vindictively; and another approach to the subject of black eyes caused Louie to yield hurriedly. She folded the cloth and found a piece of brown paper; Kitty did not notice that she enclosed no message.

But suddenly Louie had an odd little hesitation. She knew it to be ridiculous and a sentimentality, but while she did not want to send a particular message, she yet did not want to send the teacloth entirely without one. The opportunity for the little secret luxury would probably not occur again.... Kitty was condescendingly appraising her furniture again; on the mantelpiece lay a piece of blank card; it seemed to be there almost for a purpose, and furtively Louie took it. She scrawled an "L" upon it and slipped it into the parcel.

A few minutes later Kitty left, taking the wedding present with her.

Left at last alone, Louie once more went into her bedroom and threw herself on her bed. She lay with her hands clasped behind her head, her gaze now resting on Billy's etching, now straying idly over the brown-papered walls.

So they were to be married. And after that?

Well, she thought that on the whole she was glad. The curtain was about to fall on that drama that had begun at the Business School in Holborn, and so there would be an end of *that*.... What now? What about those fancy pictures with which she had beguiled herself as she had ridden on buses and trams and worked at her crochet during the rests? What about those half-whispered, nonsensical conversations? What about those drowsy, secret quarters of an hour out of which she had come with slight starts to smile at herself? They were to be married. What next? 254

The answer came as if for months it had been merely awaiting her pleasure. It was as plain as day that she could now have as much of these as ever she pleased. For what it was worth, the freedom of her cuckoo-cloud-land was about to be definitely made over to her. Because nothing else was hers, that was all the more hers.... Kitty's tidings brought it so sharply home to her that she forgot that those sweet hours of licence were no new thing. She forgot that it was no new thing to walk, in fancy, the woods of Mallard Bois and the lanes of Rainham Parva with him by her side, no new thing to call his name down the remembered glades—"Jim!" (not, as others called him, "Jeff"). She forgot that it was old and outworn already; she saw in it only newness and liberty and delight. A Jim of sorts was now hers, ineluctably and for ever—a Jim who did not fool

predestined spinsters—a Jim who would know better than blunder into a blind and stupid marriage—a Jim whose relentless hand had not—had not—had not——

But here, as she paused, the colour that had made her cheeks rosy ebbed as if a brush loaded with white had been passed over them. His ruthless hand had—had—almost certainly had——

It was as if, in her fancy, a prison bell had tolled and a black flag had been run up in the morning breeze——

He was certainly a murderer; over the threshold of that hideous fact she must step before she could enter her palace of insubstantial delights. Stained she must take even the phantom of his 255
hand, or not at all. Suppose the joy were to leave her, but the horror to remain?

She closed her eyes.

But she opened them again. She faced it. Say he was—that; what then? The joy and the horror were fatally one. A man capable of all—all—even of that—and her lover! Oh, the moment the shudder had passed the worst was over! He had killed; yes, but for a cause! He had been horribly to be feared; yes, but without the dread of him too she would not have had the whole of him, and she wanted the whole of him. *Not* kill, with such a reason? Withhold death, with something approaching that was worse than death? Oh, Louie knew all about that; Miss Cora had told her....

A murder? There were things by the side of which a murder, once you had made up your mind to it, was a trifle!

Are women so? Is it so that they will place their soft hands, like willow-leaves, in those other hands that may be black with dreadful work, red with destruction, yet, seeing less than man and more than man, they care not? Is it so that they will set their lips, as if for a kiss, against the mouth of war itself with its ten thousand deaths? It seems to be so. Their loved ones, when they die, do not do so of fevers and shattered tissues, but of their own clear and trusted heroism. "Go," they say to the next one, even to the little Jimmy, "go—and come back if you may—and, though wooden props keep you together, you shall be beautiful to the mother who bore you—to the wife whose task it must be to take you to pieces and put you together again—to the woman who, 256
because of her own heavenly dreaming, cannot think of the fiend you were in that hour when the call sounded and you dropped the point of your lance to the charge."

But one thing was clear: her dreams must remain dreams. If she would keep what was left her, she must never, never, never see him now!

PART V
THE CONSOLIDATION

259

I

The habit of sitting for artists leaves its mark on a woman. This mark is the lack of mystery—the "looked at" appearance. But it has its compensations. Chief of these are a physical unconsciousness, an absence of coquetry, and a liberation of the mind so complete that a sudden recall has all the effects of shock. Thus, a model posing for a whole class of men has been known to faint because she has been seen through the skylight by a "man" who mended the roof.

In some such state of liberation Louie, on an afternoon late in the June of 1900, posed for Billy Izzard. It was in Billy's new studio, a large upper room in Camden Town, opposite the Cobden Statue. The place was so light that Billy had actually had to cut some of the light off. The upper part of the far window, that towards which Louie's face was turned, was darkened by a linen blind; the lower part of it was shrouded with tissue paper. The whole corner was enclosed by a screen. It was there that Billy did his etching. Behind another screen was Billy's bed. At present Louie's clothes lay on it.

It was half-past five, but the best light of a changeable day. They had had tea; the tray with the tea-things lay on the floor; and, except that he grunted occasionally, "Raise your hand a bit," or "Head a bit more round," Billy's absorption in his work was complete. He had even worked through the short rests. During these intervals Louie had crocheted. The crochet, only a little 260
whiter than the foot near it, lay on the throne now.

Louie was not thinking; you can hardly call it thought when any trifle on which your eyes rest gives your mind its cue. Louie's eyes, the only parts of her that moved, had rested on the crochet, and that had brought Céleste into her mind. Céleste was leaving her; it had something to do with phylloxera and a brother's vines; Céleste, between two loves, must leave the boy and return to

Provence. Then Louie's eyes fell on the chair in which Billy etched, and presently Kitty occupied her—Kitty, who liked her etchings in pairs, but surmised that odd ones came cheaper. Louie had really no choice but to do what she was going to do about Kitty. Jimmy must have somebody during the day, and Louie, moreover, must have ten shillings a week from somewhere. As a matter of fact, Kitty had agreed to pay her fifteen shillings, and, in the intervals of looking after Jimmy, proposed to type. Then, as her eyes moved to the screen round the bed, she remembered that her boots must be resoled. They would carry another sole, and it had been raining off and on during the greater part of the day. And then something else brought little Jimmy into her mind again.

For a wonder, she had not thought of a bigger Jimmy all the afternoon. But on other afternoons she had. Billy sometimes remarked on a passing tender colour; she always had to restrain a smile at that. Her tender colour? There was not a particle of that looked-at superficies of hers that, often and often, did not answer to a secret thought.... Perhaps Billy, plain common-sense man, could have told her what those secret thoughts really meant. Perhaps Billy, sensitive painter, could have told her how sweet and pale and charming things must shun comparison with the 261
robuster stuff. As, in some delicate pastoral or *fête galante*, art might turn its happy eyes inward on itself, so that the putting on of a slipper and the nymph's hand trembling in a silken fold and the promised favour of a smiling look hardly die because they hardly live, so Louie too turned her eyes inwards. What she found within herself still sufficed her.

"Better rest a bit," said Billy, looking up as he began to scrub in a background.

Louie stepped down from the throne, cast a wrap about her shoulders, and began to crochet again.

Again she hoped she was not doing an unwise thing in having Kitty to come and live with her. But the flat was at last taken. It was a top one in the New King's Road. A Board School now blocks out the pretty view that Louie presently had at night, of the distant cupful of light that was Earls Court, with the illuminated advertisement of the Big Wheel appearing and disappearing as the structure slowly turned. Well, Kitty's fifteen shillings would pay the rent, and the experiment would be a good thing for Kitty also. Louie had furniture enough—in fact, it would be a very good thing—all round.

"Come along—time," Billy grunted. "And I say, can you stop a bit later to-night? I've got to go out, but if I don't finish this thing to-day I never shall——"

Louie mounted the throne again, and again the silence was broken only by Billy's stepping back from his canvas and forward again.

The light began to fail, and Billy began to work the more furiously. "Give me just another ten minutes," he muttered, a brush between his teeth; "this'll make some of 'em sit up, I think; it's 262
painting, this is!... But I don't know, perhaps I'd better let it go as it is; it's a job, anyway. All right, Louie, thanks.... Right-o, Jeffries; I didn't think it was so late."

The last words were spoken to the man who had knocked at the door and, without waiting for a reply, walked in.

Louie had heard the steps on the stairs; perhaps—she could not tell—she had already thought it unusual that the steps had not stopped at the water-tap on the landing below that was the supply for the two upper floors. Billy used that tap when he washed his brushes; he was looking for his palette-knife now.

But Louie neither saw Billy nor heard his grumblings because the knife was not to hand. She was looking past Billy, past the easel with the study upon it, at the man who had entered. For one moment she was wondering that she had not always known, not only that he would come some day, but that he would come that day; the next moment she had told herself that she had always known that.

Of her whole body, from the foot near the crochet to the last brown hair of her head, her lips were the only portion that did not receive him with a lightsome, quiet, fair, trusting smile.

Absurd ever to have supposed that they would never meet! Wise to have known so perfectly what would happen when they did!

What had happened? Oh, every particle of her seemed to sing to every other particle what had happened! Those pittings of her profession? Oh, there they went, washed out, all out, in the baptism of a look! Her fancies—those idle promises to pay drawn on a non-existent bank? Oh, 263
they had gone, and here was payment itself, the solid, actual cash! She was suddenly rich. As she stood there, rich in seeing him, rich in being seen by him, every one of those worthless bills was honoured in full. She could have laughed at her past poverty. She could have cried aloud: "Jim, I'm here—look at me—no, not my eyes only——"

And he too seemed to be as she had always known he would be—singled out, down to his very manner of wearing his clothes—among men. Stupid, that of all those times she had thought of him she had never once thought of him as in evening-dress! But that, in all this perfection, was only one more reciprocated perfection: she so—he so——

"Oh, Jim—*not* my eyes only!" she well-nigh cried again.

But the lion's eyes never moved from her own grey ones.

"Right, Louie, I've finished," said Billy, looking up from his palette-scraping.

And within herself she wailed: "Oh, *so* soon? Must it be over already? Must I sit for men all these days, and then, when *my* man comes——? Oh, a moment!... Well, he shall see me move—and I won't look at him—I'll tell myself—oh, just one more fancy!—that he isn't here."

She descended from the throne and passed behind the screen.

Was it strange that already, as she dressed in Billy's studio, she knew that she would never dress in an artist's studio again, and made of her fastening of hooks and strings a grave little ceremonial?—(There! With that fastening yet another chapter was closed; oh, trust her, there should be no reopening of it!)—Or that she should have a little shiver, at the thought that he might not have come? Suppose he had knocked at the door, and Billy had cried: "Half-a-moment —slide, Louie—come in!" Suppose—but the tremor passed. She had always known he would come; she had known it just as she had known everything else about him. Again every fibre of her was joyous. She was here on the earth—she, Louie Causton, daughter of a pugilist and of a Scarisbrick, gardener, typist, artists' model, and all else she might ever be—that she might know all about this man. To have ever doubted it would have been not to deserve him. And here he was, in the same room with her—he, beyond the screen, she behind it—only the two of them, for Billy had gone down to the tap to wash his brushes. 264

Now what should she do?

No, she would not go out and join him; not as she now was; not a skirt and blouse, after that fairness. Nor yet would she speak. Surely it was for him to speak now! She had been speaking to him, singing to him, all music to his eyes; there does come a point (she told herself) when the woman ceases to do everything; he must speak now. She knew he would speak. So she stood, upright, close to the screen, waiting.

He did speak, and like smoke another flock of fancies fled for ever. They were the fancies in which she had tried to remember his voice. It came, henceforth unforgettable, pure rest after her strivings. He too seemed to be near the screen; only a screen between them; but the phrases that were breaking their long silence were merely automatic. He was saying something about seeing her presently; she heard him pronounce the word "Piccadilly," and the most familiar image of Piccadilly sprang up in her mind. "Swan and Edgar's," she was whispering back over the screen. 265

"No, no." This came quickly, protestingly.

"At half-past ten," she whispered.

"Yes."

Then the dialogue was at an end. Billy had returned. Some moments later she heard more words, a laugh, and the closing of a door. She realised that he had gone.

Only then did she come out from behind the screen.

Billy was wriggling into his overcoat and muttering something about being late. "Got to go and keep that chap's wife company," he said. "Regular little Philistine, she is; I suppose that's why I go; can't stand these blessed artists. I say, he'd no idea I'd a model, you know—sorry."

"All right, Billy," said Louie demurely.... "Sorry!" So was not she!

"And I say, I'm afraid I shall have to pay you next time. I'm cleaned out."

"It doesn't matter. Send me a steak in as you go out; I'll have my dinner here."

"Right. Odd-looking chap that, isn't he? A good sort though. I picked him up at the Langham one night. I took this place from him when he got married."

"He lived here?" (What, another wonder?)

"Yes. Well, I'll send your steak in. Good-bye." Billy bolted.

He had lived there too! How ex—how entirely to have been expected! Louie walked round the room, looking at the walls, the ceiling, out of the windows, anew. He had lived there: read, eaten, slept there; what a coinci—what a perfectly natural circumstance! Then, leaning against the wall, she found Billy's study. Her eyes devoured it. She set it against the throne, and then walked to where he had stood when he had entered. She gave a rich, low laugh; she told herself what a fool she was; but folly so lovely made life. Again she looked at the wet painting. She had looked so to him—— 266

She put the study back against the wall, but in another place. "That study's mine, Billy," she muttered; "mine, not yours or anybody else's, do you understand? You gave him my violets; he's welcome to them; this belongs to me. Jim! Jim!" she murmured.

"Well, I suppose it's crochet now," she went on by-and-by. "Do you realise, Louie Causton, that you've sat your last? And have you any idea of what you're going to do instead? It looks as though Kitty's fifteen shillings would come in useful after all."

As if otherwise she might have forgotten it, she repeated to herself, over and over again, that she

was to meet him at Swan and Edgar's at half-past ten. At one of the repetitions—it was as she was cooking her steak over the little gas-ring that, perhaps, had once been his—it occurred to her why he had muttered that quick "No, no," when she had proposed that meeting-place. She glowed, she laughed through a sheen of tender tears. "Dear, dear one! *You* don't think that corner good enough for us, my sweet little outcast and me. Well, we won't thank you; we won't belittle him by thanking him, will we, Jimmy?——"

But she did not promise not to look her thanks when she met him at Swan and Edgar's at half-past ten. 267

Presently she pushed her plate away; she could not eat. She had felt her bosom rise once more. It had risen as it had never risen for anything or anybody save for the little Jimmy, and it rose, it seemed to her, for a similar reason. For in her hands even his physical safety lay. He was to be mothered too. Her unfelt arms were to be about him, the milk of her protection to be his life. By his strength he had thought to give himself to somebody else, but by his need he was still hers. A gladness richer than she had ever, ever known swelled within her. He, the great weakling—she, the strong one, to cherish and support——

"Jim!" she murmured, smiling, uplifted, lost. It was as if his weary, tawny head was on her breast.

And she was going to hear his voice again, at Swan and Edgar's, at half-past ten.

She feared that her own emotion might have exhausted her ere ever the hour came.

II

"Your hat will be spoiled if you don't take your share of the umbrella," she said. It was a silk hat, and she supposed that silk hats cost money. A fine, persistent rain was falling.

She thought that he answered that it didn't matter.

"Then you might at least turn your trousers up." Her own shabby old grey coat didn't matter, but his trousers——

He seemed to be on the point of replying that they didn't matter either, but changed his mind. He stooped and turned them up. She held the umbrella while he did so, and then gave it to him again, replacing her right hand where it had been—on his left forearm. 268

It was on these mere externals of him—his hat, his coat, his trousers, his boots—that she had hardly for a moment ceased to feed her eyes. Anything else might wait; for the present the stuff of his sleeve was more to her than the stuff of his soul. She luxuriated shamelessly in the smallest actualities of his presence; why, even mirth stood but a remove away. His overcoat, for example: it was not that old tawny one that had made him so much like a lion, but it was an old one for all that; was she *never* to see her man in a new overcoat? Jim and his overcoats! But the rest of him was beyond criticism. Certainly he must be making money. She wished she could have called money to him with a wand, conjured it to him, as much as ever he wanted. Had it not been that she would have had to take her hand from his sleeve, she would have liked to step back to look at his great church-door of a back again. Of his face she could see little, but that did not prevent her looking until it would hardly have surprised her had he flushed and said, "Don't gloat over me like that." His hat was tilted down, the large peaks of his overcoat collar projected like wings.

No, she did not want to know what he thought or felt; bother all that part of him! When her thirsty senses had drunk their full, then would be time enough for the other things.

They were walking somewhere behind the Horse Guards. Stretching before them was the long, empty avenue of the Mall. She was looking at the perspective of lamps and trees and drizzle, when suddenly he spoke. Instantly all her faculties seemed to become one overgrown faculty, that of hearing. Not that he was saying anything; he was, as a matter of fact, only asking her whether she was warm; and she replied, "Quite." She was almost amused that he should ask. His nearness warmed her more than did her garments. Her hand thrilled deliciously on his sleeve again.... 269

Oh, the satisfaction of that, just that, after all her past inquisitions into his soul!

But come to speech they must, and that very soon; and perhaps that curious magnification of trifles made it easier. Indeed, half the formidableness of the single question she wanted to ask him had vanished already. To say to him, now or in a few moments: "Did you kill Archie Merridew?" seemed somehow not very much more unusual than asking him the time. Now that she came to think of it, even that question seemed less important than another one: "Can you kill somebody and still be happy?" She hoped in her heart that he could. It would be his justification. Had it been an unrighteous killing, that would have been another matter; as it was, she would have had him unhappy only had he not killed. And, as he showed no sign of breaking silence, she might as well ask him that now.

So, reluctantly turning her eyes from his face and looking ahead into the haze of the rain, she suddenly said: "Are you happy?"

She wasn't surprised that he didn't reply at once. Of course men didn't. They had their usual formalities to go through, of "Why do you ask?" and so forth—a sort of routine before they could

answer a plain question. As he began to go through it now she made a little impatient movement. She didn't want all that. Then he deigned to reply to her inferior intelligence. Yes, he was happy. 270

"You *are*?" she said, with an exultant little leap.

Yes, he was; but again, apparently, he couldn't say a thing and leave it. In the middle of more stupid, logical, masculine things (he seemed to be qualifying his statement with something or other about his conduct to Kitty Windus) she cut him short.

"Tell me," she said, repeating the little impatient gesture, "you killed that boy, didn't you?"

They had been following the railings that divided the Mall from St. James's Park, but she had stopped to ask her question. And she was looking full at him now. But she could not see him very well; a lamp and a plane-tree made all an obscurity of vague shadows and wet reflections. But then he stepped slowly back, taking her umbrella with him, and twice, as he held the umbrella unsteadily, the light came and went on his cheek and chin; and then, as he took a step farther back still, the umbrella bobbed on the railings, from the points of it came little bright slivers of drops, and she found herself searching under a lamplit sector of alpaca for his eyes.

The danger of asking, actually, a question you have asked, but not actually, a hundred times before, is that your own mere familiarity with it throws you out in your calculation. Now she found herself suddenly hoping that what she felt to be working beyond the umbrella edge—for she felt it rather than saw it—was not fear.

For, of course, she had miscalculated a little—had been stupid to think that it was all as old a story to him as it was to her. Obviously it would not at once occur to him that there had been nothing to find out, but that instead the whole thing had been merely enacted before her eyes; he 271
was sure to be thinking that on some point of evidence he had been betrayed. What sort of point that could be, unless it had something to do with the black eyes that seemed to haunt Kitty, he might know, but she could not guess; and all at once she had a purely physical shrinking. She would rather not know. She could string herself up to the thought of murder, but the bestial details—no, not those. Those were his affairs. They were to be taken for granted as things necessarily involved. And already she was on the point of feeling herself a little disappointed in him. For in the shadow of the umbrella her eyes had now found his; his head was a little turned, and she saw the whites of them.

It *was* fear. She, it seemed, could contemplate unafraid a sacrifice that he quaked to have carried out.

But as, with another little falling of drops from the umbrella, he steadied himself and stepped forward from the railings again, additional light came to her. It was fear, but not that fear, that haunted the amber eyes. The fear was of herself. He feared, not the information she possessed, but her whole understanding and condemnation. He feared lest she also should say: "It was murder; you are here to be judged; me too, with all the world, you must account against you; I set my mark too upon your brow."

And as he appeared sorrowfully to acquiesce in that also, nothing could have seemed lonelier nor more touching than the quietly spoken words with which he held the umbrella over her again:

"You're getting wet."

It was as though he told her that though he went outcast she must not get wet. 272

Her answer was to put her hand under his sleeve again. They walked on.

But he had not answered her question. Perhaps he thought he had: to all intents and purposes he had; but she wanted, not so much the word, as that he should not withhold the word. He was walking slowly, heavily, like a tower by her side; she had the sense of his fearful overweight; she would give him time. They continued to walk, their mingled shadow on the pavement as they passed each lamp creeping away before them as if the beam of some lighthouse had had the sinister property of obscurity.

Then, within a little distance of Buckingham Palace, she stopped again. Again their eyes met under the wet, black mushroom of the umbrella.

"You did kill that boy, didn't you?"

He had a slight start. It seemed to her that he even apologised for having kept her waiting for the answer. Formerly she had seen stratagems in his eyes; now, as he dipped the umbrella for a moment and stood full in the light of another lamp, she looked only into grave, candid depths.

"Yes," he said. "You know I killed him."

"Ah!"

Again her hand slid, as if of itself, back into its place. Again they walked on. The next thing that came to her was another ridiculous yet oddly precious trifle. She wore kid gloves; before, when she had danced with him in an old frock of oyster-grey, she had worn white ones; must she (she wondered) always wear gloves with him, as he always wore old overcoats? She longed to take one glove off; yet she—she, who had met Roy by the stile at night—for very bashfulness dared not. The circumstance struck her; how was that? Gifts of understanding for her he had: had he 273
that gift too, the gift of her own bashfulness back again? Up went her spirit on wings....

Yes, it was that—or for a night at least she would have it so. As impossibilities are reconciled in a dream, so he seemed, by his mere towerlike presence, to resolve in one large atonement, her own life as it had been and the sweet and virginal and dear smiling thing that it might have been. In no less a miracle than that she seemed to herself to be walking. He could not only have kissed her; he could have had her first kiss. He could not only have turned, as he did turn, leaning against the pillar-box by the Equerries' entrance of the Palace, to look at her again, but he could have received in return—did receive in return—such a look as she knew he also could hardly have had the like of before. And it made no difference—as in a dream such a thing might make no difference—that he had a wife, she a son. Let him have his wife, she her son; she could find room for wives and sons too. To-morrow, perhaps, it would not be so; to-morrow might be like yesterday again; but to-night—to-night—oh, the first garden was not less trodden than these rainy streets, the Barracks, Gorringes', and Grosvenor Road! Her hand moving again on his sleeve was telling him even now, if he would but listen, that though man may not know that it is not good for him to be alone, woman knows it, and maybe still remembers it out of her knowledge of the place whence she came later than he.

And he too understood now, for she was not so rapt but that she remembered that he asked her, somewhere between a sandbin and a street lamp, whether she was happy too, and that, looking up at him, she smilingly whispered: "Yes, now." And she was not so rapt but that she remembered 274
telling him, flatly and with another happy and laughing and triumphant look: "You can't prevent it!" But she was so rapt that of much else that he and she said she had no very clear recollection. Words that seemed unforgettable when they came had eluded her almost in their own echo. But she knew that she gave him the liberty of herself with no more reserve than she had claimed that of him. She knew that because, later, but she did not know when, he muttered, in some street or other, she did not know where: "God bless your boy."

Well, if she forgot things now, there would be many days to come in which she would remember them.

Merely because it must be very late—she had no idea what time it was—she grudged the going of the moments almost angrily. Already she was becoming as hungry again as if she had not broken that long, long fast. But she admitted that it was not unnatural that he should think of his own concerns a little too, and want to ask her questions. She began to answer the questions hurriedly, to get them over.—Kitty Windus? Oh (she told him) he might leave Kitty to her; she'd answer for Kitty!—His wife and her complete ignorance? (His wife's ignorance appeared to be complete.)—Miriam Levey? (Oh, why would he not be quick, and she so hungry!)—And then back to his wife again; what about her? (he wanted to know). Louie wondered a little that he should consider her to be his wife's keeper also, but she answered his questions. That, she told him, was his private affair; but, if he really wanted to know what Louie thought about it, Louie could not conceive of a marriage with so huge a secret in it continuing undisclosed. *Voilà*; there he had it; and *now* might 275
she please be permitted to enter into her own happiness again?

She was back into it, bathing in it again, almost before she was aware. A minute before she had not known what street they were in; now she saw the Chelsea Hospital on the other side of the road. On this side was a row of houses; she knew one of them; a painter for whom she had sat lived there; his studio was in the yard at the back. The thought of a studio was all that was needed. She thrilled again.

No more studios! So poignantly did she burn that she could hardly imagine that her glowing did not communicate itself. Studios, after that beautiful, beautiful sketch of Billy's? Good gracious, no! She was going to Billy's to fetch that sketch on the morrow; she would like to see Billy deny it to her! And that poor, poor old oyster-grey! Just because he had seen her in it once she had mooned over it, smiled over it, sighed over it; but it could go now—she had a richer memory!... Furtively during the last few minutes she had been working off her right glove; it slipped from her hand to the pavement; but she was afraid to stop. Let it stay; somebody would turn it over with the point of a walking-stick in the morning and perhaps wonder who had lost it.... She stole another look at him; her hand crept along his sleeve; the tips of her fingers were on his wrist; her lips shaped his name: "Jim!"

Then, unexpectedly, it rushed upon her in full measure. She knew these streets familiarly; they were in Swan Walk now; and the thing happened all in a moment. Again, during those anxious questions of his about Kitty Windus, Miriam Levey, his wife, she had that sense of his terrible 276
overweight: now, passing a doorway, he suddenly reeled. He began to sink....

In an instant her arms were about him. Not the unfelt, immaterial arms of her mothering vision in Billy's studio, not that other breast, offered but impressed, sustained him; she held him within her two arms of flesh and blood, upon that firm, warm bosom that changed its shape to his weight upon it—the bosom he had seen yesterday, white hives, all their honey his.... She bent and kissed the shoulder of his coat. Oh, if he might but faint, quite, that she might carry him somewhere, or, if she could not carry him, stay with him where he was—she cared not—rest by his side through an endless night! Her heart, yes, her lips too, called him; a whisper might not reach him; she called him aloud:

"Oh, come, come! Come, come!"

Afterwards she thought of it as a hail from a ship to another ship across a stretch of water so narrow that it was all but a stepping aboard. How could such a hail be a farewell also? They were

not passing; as they glided side by side together, either seemed stationary. Other things, the whole offing of Life, were in motion; these slipped past, as it were sky, shore, shipping; but for a space he and she spoke from bridge to bridge. And he heard the hail too, for he opened his eyes. Though they never looked on her again they did so now, relinquishing all to her. Was there anything she had not known? There was nothing she might not know—now——

By-and-by she had helped him to a seat on the Embankment and had made him sit down. She took off his tie and collar; she smiled as he thanked her. "That was absurd," he said. 277

Then he asked her where she lived.

It was over.

Well, perhaps more would have been more than she could have borne.

But when she sat at last alone in the hansom he had called, conscious that she was wet to the skin and that her boots needed to be resoled, she still had the image of the ships before her eyes, gliding together side by side, with all else in quiet, relentless motion behind them. She held fast to it. She could not have endured to think that of that night's long wandering all that would remain on the morrow would be yet another dream and a wet glove left behind in an empty Chelsea street.

III

Louie Causton would have been more than human had she not frequently thought, as her life became a moving from pillar to post again, that there was an exasperating proportion of absence in her heart's story. But at first she was not petulant. Some absences are brimful, as other presences are mere vacancy, and, now that she no longer sat, she had other things, plenty of them, to think of.

There was little money in the sale of crochet; there was not much more in sitting in costumes hired from the Models' Club. From both these things she quickly turned. Perhaps she turned from them the more quickly because of Kitty Windus—for Kitty was now with her in the flat in the New Kings Road, and the way in which Kitty, without spoken words, paid over her weekly fifteen 278
shillings, was in itself a spur. Not that Kitty always spared her the words either. Two words at least that she did not always spare her were "rise" and "permanency." Often Louie felt all the amazement, and now quite without any leaven of amusement, that she had felt when first she had entered the Business School in Holborn; but she was not keeping Kitty (or Kitty keeping her) either for love of Kitty or her own mere necessity. To keep Kitty was part and parcel of that absence she was already beginning to resent. It was merely safer to keep Kitty than to have anybody else keep her. Besides, as long as she kept Kitty, she had only to write a note, justifying it afterwards as best she could, and two ships (so to speak) would come together again. She delayed to write the note; none the less it was in her power to do so.

So (to turn for a moment to that moving background of Life in the offing) the September of 1900 found her answering the advertisement of a Bayswater seedsman and discovering the precise market value of her old Rainham Parva training. But by the end of the same month she was temporarily installed at the clerk's table of an exhibition of French paintings at a Mayfair gallery, and glad of the job. Say (the question is hardly worth going into) that it was the influence of the paintings themselves that once more caused a manager to propose that Louie's wages should be substantially increased, for a consideration; it didn't matter; Louie, who did not now throw away jobs for nothing, merely told the man not to be silly—than which, as it happened, she could have done no better thing, for at the close of the exhibition the manager, now looking upon her almost as a dear daughter, found her another place, this time at a gallery academic both artistically and 279
morally, warned her against dangerous young men, and kissed Louie on both her laughing cheeks. After that her French again served her turn, for she entered the office of an illustrated weekly; or if it was not entirely the French that did it, so much the luckier Louie to possess even yet a frock that was a rest to the proprietor's eyes after a succession of applicants in walking skirts and white muslin blouses. This job Louie actually kept till June 1901; then an amalgamation took place that threw her out of work again. Three weeks later, after a severe trial of her temper by Kitty, she was a "carpet designer"—that is to say, she coloured, in an upper room near St. Paul's Churchyard, pieces of paper so minutely chequered that sometimes for an hour or two she could not get the flicker out of her eyes. She made a grace of retiring from this occupation as soon as she saw that if she did not do so her employer would retire from the office of paymaster. After that she was reduced to sitting again, in costume. Nothing else offered. Jimmy must eat, Kitty's fifteen shillings be covered. The female figure in "The Two-stringed Bow," which caused such a (journalistic) sensation in the Academy of the following year, is Louie. Chaff did not recognise it. Billy Izzard, who had seen the costume at the Models' Club, did. He persecuted Louie to sit for him again as before.

Of the Models' Club she was still a member, and she got on well with the girls. Once she took Kitty Windus there, but only once; a black-and-white man, knowing nothing of Kitty's pound a week, asked her to sit to him as Miss Tox, in "Dombey and Son"; and Kitty, presently reading the book, treated Louie for some days with marked superciliousness. That came of making yourself 280
cheap, her manner seemed to say; and she reported Miriam Levey, whom she met near Piccadilly Circus one day, as having said, "Vell, vat do you expect?" Louie did not much like this meeting

with Miriam Levey. She remembered the Jewess's pertinacity and curiosity for curiosity's sake. Many such meetings between Kitty and Miriam Levey might easily complicate her own life.

There were two bedrooms in the flat in the New Kings Road. In the larger one, that at the back that Louie shared with Jimmy, there hung at first the sketch she had begged ("stolen" was Billy's word) after she had ceased to sit. When Louie took this down one day and put it out of sight, she told herself that she did so on Jimmy's account; but perhaps those absences that she had to convert into presences as best she could had something to do with it too. Perhaps, if she did not see the thing for a time, its first freshness would return.

Sometimes she thought these absences really too bad; she began to think so with increasing frequency as Kitty's fits of patronage became no rarer. Really it didn't seem fair that she should be asked to bear them. The least Jim could have done, since she bore them for him, would have been to let her know that he still existed. She did not much mind looking after Kitty, but it was a little too much that on his part *all* should be absence!

And that was why, with Kitty always at hand for her excuse, she did not write to him.

In a word, the joy of bearing for him was becoming fainter in proportion as the burden itself increased.

Then a piece of news with which Kitty came home one night added its trifle to her smart. She was alone in the flat that night; Jimmy had been in bed two hours and more, and Louie, after having 281
folded his clothes, cleared up his litter of toys from the floor, and tried to read a newspaper, had turned low the gas, drawn up a chair to one of the three windows that looked down on the New Kings Road, and sat gazing out over the trees and houses and scattered lights that stretched away to Earls Court. It happened that that night the Exhibition was closing for the season; a firework demonstration was in progress; and out of the little pool of orange light rockets rose from time to time, falling again in slow showers of red and green and white. If no cart was passing she could just hear the muffled detonations.

She knew that if an impossibility could have happened, and Jim could have walked into the room, sat down by her, and watched the white and green and red rockets with her, that slight constant smart at her heart would have gone; but now she told herself that it was not as if she was young, with unlimited time before her. She was thirty-two, and too much absence is not sustenance enough for thirty-two. But that, she supposed, meant nothing to a man. Men did not appear to get old in quite the same way. The man who had tried to make love to her at the French picture exhibition was sixty if he was a day; sixty, and still fiery; and apparently he had found her still desirable also. But it was not for much longer. Women died with their beauty. Of course she had her little darling asleep there; men had the comfortable theory that women wanted nothing more than to "live again" (as they called it) in their children; well, all that Louie could say was that she did not agree with them. She knew one woman who wanted more. It might be wicked and 282
unnatural to endow Jimmy, as she had done, with a sort of vicarious father, but Roy was gone out of her life—gone; to have married him would have made more mischief than it would have cured; and Louie saw no reason for not telling herself the truth about herself. But a vicarious father who stayed away was altogether too vicarious....

Well, well, she supposed that if a woman would have a man at all she must put up with a selfish one.

He, of course, knew exactly what he wanted, and had got it; nor could she say that he had not earned it—grimly. But now that he had got it, what about somebody else who was helping him to keep it—somebody called Louie Causton, who stepped in when she was wanted, took half the burden off his back, and was presently sent about her business again? (For she had remembered now the quite personal, preoccupied questions, about Kitty and Miriam and his wife, that he had put to her on the night of their long walk.) Oh, no doubt she would be there when she was next wanted, to share with him the thing another woman ought to have shared (but thank goodness the other woman had not!). It had not in the least surprised Louie that his wife knew nothing. It would have surprised her very much indeed if she had known anything. Jim might humbug himself as he liked, but at the bottom of his heart (she now saw) he knew better than to tell her. She was not the kind; it was Louie who was that kind, and he knew it too. But there: she was pretty, and men asked no further; give them hair and eyes and an unlined brow and the rest could go hang. Heart and vision—no; courage and devotion and the strength to bear—no; but twenty years, a curving eyelash, and a bloom more quickly gone than the falling rockets yonder, 283
and ah, how they ran! But they didn't trust them. No, the other sort was sent for then. And it was the business of the other sort to be, always, as strong as they sometimes thought themselves.

The last rocket fell; the lights of the big wheel began to make quicker revolutions; and Louie left the window and turned up the gas again.

As she did so the electric bell in the kitchen rang. It rang again, and then Louie remembered that the street door four floors below would be closed for the night. She passed out on to the landing and descended the stairs. It was Kitty. She had forgotten her key. Kitty panted as they ascended again.

"How long have you been in?" she demanded, as she took off her hat and coat in the little hall.

"All the evening," said Louie. "Have you had supper?"

"No, I haven't," said Kitty shortly, and then came her grumble. Why hadn't Louie had the gas lighted? Fireworks indeed! And there Kitty had been waiting for twenty minutes and more, thinking nobody was in—anybody might forget their key once in a while, mightn't they? Hadn't Louie forgotten hers not a week ago, and that not the only time? Kitty had a right to forget her key sometimes. And there had Louie been in all the time, watching fireworks! Well, what was there for supper? And the fire almost out too; really, if Kitty paid for the coals, Louie might at least keep the fire in!

Louie mended the fire and got Kitty's supper. When Kitty had finished she cleared the little round table again, and by the time Kitty had put on a pair of red bedroom slippers and turned up her 284
skirt to the blaze she deigned to relent a little. She admitted that it wasn't as if Louie had known she was waiting in the street, but all the same it was annoying.

"And now I've got a piece of news for you," she said, warming her hands. "It's a dead secret, but I don't suppose Miriam would mind my telling you. She's in for no end of a good job in a few weeks! But she always gets good jobs. She has determination, Miriam has, you see."

Louie was standing by the end of the mantelpiece, stirring a cup of cocoa. She only said "Oh?" Her own lack of determination was now an old reproach.

"Ra-*ther*! Have you heard me speak of a Mr. Pepper ever? But no, you won't have; you're always a bit sniffy about Miriam, you see, and that doesn't encourage people to talk. Well, she's his confidential clerk at the Freight and Ballast Company, but he's chucking that, and who do you think with?—James Jeffries!"

She paused to see the effect on Louie, and then continued.

"Yes, James Jeffries! What do you think of *that*? They're going to start on their own, in no end of a swell way, and Miriam's going over with them. It's Mr. Pepper's doing, of course, and as Mr. Pepper isn't exactly a nobody even where he is, you may bet your boots he won't change for the worse! Oh, James Jeffries knows the kind of person to hang on to! He's to be a partner, if you please, as good as Mr. Pepper himself; how's that for greasing in? Friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, I *don't* think!"

Kitty had this way now of speaking of her former *fiancé*. Sometimes she so extended his name 285
that it became "Mister James Herbert Jeffries." And however Jim now "got on," his advancement would still be, to Kitty, a magnification of her own superiority in those days when she had had a pound a week and he nothing. She began to take out hairpins and went on.

"Oh dear, I wish my brushes were here!" (Louie fetched them.) "What was I saying? Oh yes, about Miriam. She's to have an office to herself, perhaps, or at any rate she's not going to sit with the other girls; and when I tell you it's in Pall Mall, you can judge for yourself—not just a couple of offices rented, but a whole building—what ho! The stone that the builders rejected if you like! And she'll have her own extending-bracket telephone, the very latest, and arms to her chair to put her elbows on, not like the typists! And Mr. Pepper's most friendly with her—she takes down his conversations with no end of swells! And I say, Evie Jeffries won't be half set up over it all, oh no! Even *his* office—James Herbert's, Miriam says—is going to be perfectly scrumptious!"

Her head was on one side; her short hair, as she brushed it, hardly reached farther than the sharp point of her shoulder; and Louie was thinking of that spurious engagement again. And suddenly—this had happened before, but never before with so keen a stab—the thought set her raging.... She herself had been so near!... Her elbow caught her cup of cocoa; it spilt, and ran in a little stream from the corner of the mantelpiece.... So near! And once again she cried to herself that *she* would have known how to keep him, Roy or no Roy!... Kitty? What could his courtship of Kitty and her bones have been? *She* would have shown him the difference! To have been so near 286
and then—Mortlake Road, Putney!

Suddenly there seemed to her to be a great deal to be said for conventional morality after all.

For a moment her heart was full of hate—hate of Kitty, hate of Evie Jeffries, hate of Roy, hate of herself. To have been so near!

But the sharpness of it died down to a sullen ache. In his affairs he seemed to be going up, up; she had always known he would; and less than ever might she expect to hear from him now. And he would take his common little wife up with him. He might go anywhere, meet anybody; but sourly she wondered what sort of a figure he supposed his Evie would cut up there—would have cut at Trant or Mallard Bois? Oh, Louie would dearly have liked to see her there, to have pointed to her, and to have told Jim to his face that whatever ability he might have seemed to be yoked with an unimaginable stupidity, since he had not known instantly the one woman for him.

Well, there was simply no accounting for these things.

But if he was going up, Louie did not very much like the channel by which she had received the information. She had known that Kitty saw Miriam Levey; now she seemed to hear her thick voice again, "I *vill* find out!" She was aware, too, that there was little love lost between Miriam Levey and herself. She herself had encouraged Kitty in her present attitude of "Mister Jeffries," but it only needed the Jewess to propose the contrary attitude and in all probability there would be a struggle between them for the possession of Kitty. She detested Kitty; yet in order that Evie Jeffries might make an exhibition of herself among the people whose equal Louie was, Louie had 287
to put up with her, bones and chilblains and all! Much he left her, didn't he? Good gracious, yes!

And it was about time he was told that flesh and blood women weren't made like that!

Kitty, remarking that it was a shame to leave the now glowing fire, had passed out of the room for a minute; she now returned, in her slippers and nightgown. Her feet, she said, were still cold with waiting on the pavement; she would say her prayers with them turned to the fire. She knelt by a wicker chair, and set the red slippers on the low kerb, their worn soles to the fire. Louie, still from the end of the mantelpiece, watched her. At a slight sound she made Kitty turned her head for a moment; then she put it on the cushion of the chair again.

Yes, certainly Louie must have a wicked heart, or she would not have looked on the kneeling woman as she did. She wondered what, texts apart, Kitty could have to say to God. To pray—with her feet in a warm place! Why, Louie mortified herself more for an absent man than Kitty seemed to do before her Maker!... And even when she had stifled the thought she still had no more than a negative compassion for Kitty. She was not unsorry for her and her weakheadedness; beyond that Kitty was not, or ought not to have been, her affair. What was her affair was herself and what little remained of her youth. Kitty was hardly more than a year or two older than she, but she looked a dozen years older; Louie wondered whether her shoulder blades too would soon resemble the set-squares in Billy's studio, whether her waist also would seem a broken thing within empty looking folds.... 288

Kitty continued to pray and to warm her feet. Louie, wondering what her next snappishness would be when she rose from her knees again, continued to watch her.

Then Kitty rose. She turned to Louie.

"By the way, did you brush that blue skirt of mine?" she said. "Oh, very well, it doesn't matter now; perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you; thank you; I can do it myself in the morning. Sorry I spoke."

Louie turned away.

These were the times when she could hardly tell what had possessed her ever to have supposed that she would be able to keep watch and ward over Kitty at all. Kitty was perfectly free to meet Miriam Levey or anybody else she had a mind to meet. And why, she asked herself at these times, should she not meet her? Where, hanging and such moonshine apart, was the risk to Jim? Indeed, it seemed to Louie that that story that seemed so to weigh on Jim was quickly becoming altogether beside the mark. The whole venue of his difficulties was rapidly shifting. What he had done had not been discovered and probably never would be discovered; what he wanted now was, not to be protected from remote and shadowy and nonsensical dangers, but to be told how he was to be happy with the wife whom he had seen fit, in the great heap of his wisdom, to keep in ignorance. Of course the remoter danger need not be entirely forgotten, but this, or else Louie was greatly mistaken, was what those scarce-heard questions on the night of that long walk had really meant.

And, in that case, what the devil was she, Louie Causton, doing in this gallery at all, with nothing of Jim but silence and absence, and nothing but peevishness and petty tyranny from Kitty? Roy, it might be, was still ready to marry her; Buck never ceased to importune, sulk and implore; Jimmy, 289
one way or another, would be to provide for; and she knew now how little she could do for him alone. Even her desire to "show" Richenda Earle had now passed. She wanted, desperately wanted, all the things she persisted in rejecting. Why was she becoming morose, disillusioned, devil-may-care? It was a familiar question now, but as she undressed that night she asked herself again what it all meant.

She answered herself that there was no mystery about it. She supposed it happened to every woman. It meant, of course, the passing of her youth.

But, her head on her pillow, she had her compensating hour. No need to re-describe its kind; there was now added again that forced and desperate illusion, of the unity of herself, her boy, and the man she would have had his father. She knew she merely abused her fancy and must suffer for it afterwards, but no matter; if it was a drug it was a sweet one, and that it might stay with her a little longer she chose uncomfortable positions that would keep her awake. She could hear Jimmy's breathing across the dark room. Jim, Jimmy and herself——

It was against her own will that, at two o'clock in the morning, she slept.

IV

It was his voice over the telephone of the Models' Club that broke the long silence. Ten chances to one but the bell had rung in an empty room, for, save for a woman who was washing the hall floor, Louie was alone in the place. She unhooked the receiver. "Hallo!" she called.... "Yes, this is 290
the Models' Club.... This is Miss Causton...."

At last!

He did not say why he wanted to see her; he only said that he wanted to do so at once. His minimised voice, with its suggestion of distance, seemed to her curiously symbolic of their whole relation. A telephone was supposed to bring voices near, but far more than that the smallness and the distance struck her.

"No, I'm afraid not," she continued to speak into the instrument, "but I can give you dinner here. You know the address?... Yes, at seven.... All right...."

Seek him? No, she certainly would not seek him. He must come to her. She could give him tea and chops. As she hung up the receiver again she glanced at the clock over the little service counter. Eleven. Eight hours.... She had waited for months, now she must wait another eight hours. She could have faced the months again with more composure.

Only to look at the advertisements in the papers had she come to the Club that morning at all. Well, she was not going to answer that clairvoyant's announcement she had seen in *The Telegraph* now. Kitty would ask her that evening whether she had been looking for work, and would hold up Miriam Levey and her determination as an example; let her; Louie couldn't be bothered with clairvoyants and their advertisements to-day.

And Kitty little dreamed how near Louie had more than once been to showing herself as determined even as Miriam. Miriam was not the only one who might be "taken on" at this new Consolidation of Mr. Pepper's and Jim's, whatever it was. There is such a thing, when a man 291
doesn't come to you, as a miserable, ignoble yielding to the ache to go to him. There is such a thing as the willingness even to keep a door all day for the sake of seeing him go through it just once. After a certain time pride becomes a poor staff, and—but he was coming, in eight hours. That was why she had refused to dine with him. Your pride stiffens again when you have just been on the point of throwing it aside.

She knew that she would be good for nothing for the rest of the day; in that case she might as well go and see her father. She had money enough for her bus fares; half-past one found her at the Molyneux Arms.

Buck was in high feather. His name had been proposed, in the interests of Church and State, as a candidate for the Borough Council; and the chief plank of the platform which Buck occupied during the whole of that afternoon, descending from it with the greatest reluctance only when Louie vowed that she could not stay another moment, was that as long as England had Queensberrys to make her P.R. Rules it didn't matter what Radicals tried to make of her laws. Louie fondled his silver hair; dear old dad! Then she made him drive her back to Chelsea.

(Buck, by the way, was returned at the head of the poll, a few weeks later, amid acclamations that might well have rendered him deaf in his other ear also.)

Back in the Club once more, Louie set aside the best chop, and made a tour of the place in search of the narrowest table. The one she chose was so narrow that the backs of the two chairs she turned up against it almost touched. Lightheartedly she rebuked Myrtle Morris, who asked her whether she was expecting "a boy"; and she laughed as Myrtle went off to tell another girl that "Causton was on the warpath." Her warpaint consisted of a white blouse, low and perfectly plain 292
at the neck, and a navy blue skirt. She was waiting at the window for Jim twenty minutes before he came.

She had schooled herself to a rigorous composure. She opened the door for him and told him to mind the hall lamp, within an inch of which his hat reached; and the hand she gave him was not gloved this time. But she barely touched his hand; had she not two whole hours before her? He put aside a cheap hanging of rustling beads for her to pass, and then followed her into the large room on the left of the hall, empty save for a piano and a few chairs, that was used for parties and tableaux. Myrtle and another girl appeared for a moment in the doorway; the minxes appeared to be waltzing, but they had come to see who "Causton's boy" was; and as they sat down she asked him, as if daring him to find any but the plainer meaning in it, how Billy Izzard was. She exulted that she could say these things and he could not. Then she was told that their chops were ready. They passed into the next room.

The table—it was a flimsy card-table covered with a cheap traycloth stiff with starch—accounted for all awkwardnesses and proximities; again she found it secretly delicious to murmur a demure apology for its smallness. She lingered over the eating of her chop merely because her plate was edge to edge with his; she would manage badly if she could not keep him at least two hours! Then, when she could linger out her eating no longer, she asked him for a cigarette and a light—for in the studios she had learned to smoke. He gave them to her. Her lids hovered as he held the match; she wondered whether she should look straight into his eyes or keep her lids downcast. In 293
the end she did both, looking at him first, then down. Whether he looked at her at all she did not know; the first at any rate was a miss. She did not ask for a second match (she had, she told herself, some shame); instead, she put her elbows on the table and said, without further delay: "Well, what is it?"

She nodded as he began to tell her; it seemed to be pretty much what she had expected. She listened, or half listened; she would not have sworn, had he challenged her, that her attention did not wander a little. Her thoughts were ahead of his, but a little patience—he would catch up; he would see presently that what his wife might think or what she might not think (for that was what he was talking about) was of less practical importance than he supposed. Naturally his wife must be thinking this and that; marriage that left such a thing as a—call it a private execution—out of the calculation might even turn out to be a little difficult; but she might as well hear what he had to say about it. She waited for the cropping up of the names of Miriam Levey and Kitty Windus; they duly appeared. Mrs. Jeffries, it seemed, wanted to see Kitty, and Miriam Levey wanted her to do so. Why they wanted these things was not very clear, but possibly, if Louie was giving him

only half her attention, Jim was not saying all he knew either. He still considered that aspect of the affair to be wholly and solely the problem: but no doubt he would wake up by-and-by.

Suddenly she asked him whether he and his wife had quarrelled. He shook his head that apparently, in spite of its stupidity, she must still love.

"No—oh no." 294

"Well——"

And on he went again, still quite a number of leagues behind—the complication of his former engagement to Kitty, Evie's sense of unexplained things, Miriam Levey, her voracious curiosity, her presence at this new Consolidation.

But here she interrupted him. "One moment. When do you start—this Consolidation?"

He was toying with a knife; the little reflection passed over his massive face as he turned the blade. "In a few weeks. Why?"

"You don't intend to take Miriam Levey over with you?"

He put the knife down with a little slap. "I do not," he said. Louie had thought as much. So, no doubt, in spite of what she seemed to have said to Kitty, had Miriam Levey.

"Well, go on; I interrupted you," she said.

He went on. It seemed to her that if nothing had actually happened his overcarefulness was the one way likely to bring it to pass. Then, she supposed, he would ring her up on the telephone again.

By this time she was thinking far more of Miriam Levey's empty chair at the new Consolidation than she was of things unaccounted for between her guest and his wife.

And as for those unexplained things (Louie neither knew nor cared what they might be), she could only tell him now what she had told him that night when they had walked together, that wives must either be wives or not, must be told things or else be something less than wives. Perhaps she had not put it quite so plainly to him as that before, but that was what it had 295
amounted to. Men with secrets ought to marry the right women.... She stole a daring look at him across the table. He was mumbling and twiddling a spoon now. His shoulders, bigger than Buck's, were clothed in an exquisite iron-grey cloth; she wondered whether he knew that she had kissed one of them that night in a Chelsea doorway.... And then, as he paused and looked up, she spoke. She did so almost curtly. If not telling hadn't answered, she said, she could only suggest, once more, telling. As for Kitty, he might put her entirely on one side; as long as she remained with Louie, Louie would answer for her.

Then, for the first time, he seemed to show a gleam of interest in her affairs. He asked her how she got her living, now.... Her pulse quickened. Billy had told him, then; by "now" he meant now that she no longer sat; and his eyes avoided hers. He coloured; apparently he thought he was doing her an honour in wiping out all memory of that discovery in Billy's studio. An honour! She could have laughed at him. He little knew how she longed to tell him more—to tell him about the oyster-grey too—to tell him that for her it was as long ago as that. But no, he had seen the pearl ——

And it appeared that his talk really had an object now; but, as usual, she had seen the drift of it before he had. He was thinking of Miss Levey's place, if his absurd delicacies would only allow him to get it out.

"Would you accept it?" he managed at last to ask, sounding her earnestly with his eyes.

"Steady, silly woman," she whispered to herself, brightly flushing....

But, glancing at him, she suddenly winced. Twice before men had offered her posts, at more than 296
their market value, and there had been no colour in her cheeks as she had refused them; had she coloured now at the quick thought that if *he* had made such an offer she might perhaps...? If so, there was mortification and despite in her colour. Why did he offer her Miss Levey's place? Was it his wife again—always his ninny of a wife? If that was so, so much the worse for him; it was time he learned that if he got into a mess he must make shift to get out of it again. There was a new little twang in her voice as, suddenly looking into his eyes, she said: "You've no right to expect that of me!"

And as soon as the words were spoken, she saw too where she herself stood, and to what point beyond she was prepared to go. She knew now that she would have taken his job, not at added wages, but without wages at all. But to the humiliating thought that he imagined himself to be doing her a kindness was now superadded that of his entire ignorance that she might be making an attack upon his faithfulness at all. Suddenly she saw herself merely wonderful to him—*she* wonderful!—she, who had thought she could spend all her life up in the clouds, be content to be magnanimous for magnanimity's sake, virtuous for the mere love of virtue! Oh, if that was all, he needn't think *that* any longer! Wonderful?... What she wanted was not wonderful at all, oh dear, no: merely something common, coarse, filling; nothing more wonderful than that.... Wise mother, to have known that that was the end of it all, and to have taken, long ago, in Henson's studio, the short cut! She did not even try to check a wild little exclamation....

And he evidently saw something too, though what, as he blundered deeper, she did not stop to inquire. He gave a groan. "Poor woman!" he said compassionately. 297

He might just as well have set a spark to a fuse. There broke from her a peremptory cry.

"Not that, Jim—that's the one thing I will *not* bear—I will *not* be called 'poor woman'——"

And the rest now had to follow. It was the sum of her broodings, resentments, hatreds, dreams, desire, despair. Evie, him, herself—oh, it was not her fault if he didn't see now how the three of them stood. He knew only too well what he wanted: what Louie wanted she also knew only too well. Except to offer her a job that would save him even the trouble of ringing her up on the telephone when her help was required, had he ever, until this moment, looked at the thing from her point of view? He had not. She would help him still; but if their ships must part like this, at least no false tidings should pass from bridge to bridge: he should know exactly what it was he asked, and why she gave it! She began to speak rapidly, uncertainly, but sparing him nothing. Perhaps, after all, she said, his wife would understand; he had only to tell her that her husband made away with her sweetheart; perhaps she could bear it; if she couldn't well—he knew what was his for the holding up of a finger....

Then, as suddenly as she had begun, she stopped. Her voice dropped. "I've had no luck," she said, with quiet bitterness. "I'm out of it, and there's no more to say. Give me a match."

And then she rose. He might sit there if he liked.

He rose too, and they walked down the room in silence together. The bead screen of the hall parted and tinkled together again behind the great church-door of his back. Without a word he took down his coat and, under the coloured hall lamp, hoisted himself into it. And then he looked at her. 298

Already in her heart she knew that that look was the end. Her offer had been rejected. Whatever else might happen, she, Louie Causton, would never come between him and his wife. The woman who had those eyes would keep their looks; had it been Louie's fortune to have them, she would have kept their looks. He was a plotter, but not of amours; a carrier through too, but not of intrigues. So grave an innocence was his that probably he didn't know that his look told her all this; if so, it was final indeed.

So she took her dismissal, and then, with her hand on the letter-box of the door, stood gazing meditatively on the ground. She had wanted to be wooed; failing that, she had once more brought herself to woo; and this Joseph had gravely repelled her.

At last she looked up.

"About what you were saying—I mean that place of Miss Levey's," she said. "I don't think it would do—not now."

The man who could plan a murder but not an affair looked humbly up.

"Why not?" he murmured. It was as if he said: "I don't remember that meetings of ours in Billy's studio; I forget this too. You see how it is. Your taking the job would make no difference."

Slowly she shook her head. "I should be seeing you," she said. "It wouldn't do. Good-night."

She saw that she had missed even more than she had imagined. 299

And yet, before Christmas came, she was at that self-same Consolidation. In October a lofty refusal; in December a creeping back again with her tail between her legs. Where, she asked herself, was her pride now?

The answer was that that had been in October, and this was December.

When she told Kitty that she was succeeding to Miss Levey's place Kitty had certain things to say about treachery and broken friendships. She said them at some length, and then remarked that after that of course Louie could hardly expect her to stay with her.

"You never liked her," she said, as if not to like Miss Levey was an offence in itself. "And I know you tried to keep me from seeing her. Oh, you think I don't notice things, but you never made a greater mistake; I could tell you things that would surprise you! You and James Jeffries have got some game on; don't tell me he didn't give her the push; Evie and Miriam both say so; oh, you're a deep one, Louie Causton! First you come between me and Miriam; and then that day your father came and I was asking him about black eyes and he told me you could have one *without* having one till you came to blow your nose—oh, *I* watched you! And then to go worming about till you got Miriam fired and then bag her job yourself! Thank goodness, some people have better ideas of friendship than that! I have, for one. Never mind the bit you owe me; you can pay Carter Paterson with it and we'll call it quits. Perhaps it wouldn't be troubling you too much to ask you if you knew where the luggage labels are?"

So Louie let her go. The tract she received by post on the following day: "God's Eye Everywhere, or No Sins Secret," she dropped into the fire. Even if Kitty really was groping blindfold on the track of that stale old private execution, Archie Merridew didn't matter now. The question had already entered the stage of blank fatality. 300

V

Louie did not succeed to Miss Levey's chair at once. Somebody else got that, who made room for somebody else, who made room for Louie. And her arrival at the Consolidation appeared to be the signal for Jim's almost immediate departure from it—that is to say, she saw him for three weeks, then missed him for some days, asked (in another week or so) a question, and was told that a fall of some sort, supervening on many weeks of concentrated work, had necessitated a trip to Egypt. She hinted that she would like to know what his fall had been, but nobody seemed able to tell her. As a matter of fact, she never knew. It was merely an act of spite on the part of the stars against herself.

The ordeal by absence began again.

This time she was able, somehow, to endure it. She always remembered him when she passed a shipping company's office, with a model of a liner in the window and pictures of palms and pyramids and a sphinx not altogether unlike himself looming up out of the tawny sand; but at other times she well-nigh forgot him for whole days together. She could hardly question her immediate superior, a Mr. Whitlock, about him, and probably Mr. Whitlock could not question Sir Julius Pepper—for Mr. Pepper was made a knight in the new year. Sir Julius had altogether too much *nous* and urbanity to be questioned; he asked, not answered, questions. Such an 301
indiscretion would have stamped Mr. Whitlock himself as a man of a barbarous mind.

The place itself, its plate glass and marble, its gilded lifts and high galleries and lofty central dome, its floes of desks and counters and the tessellated floors over which rubber-tyred trollies ran to the strong-room every night—astonished Louie. What had been consolidated, who the men had been who had reconciled interests so great that the mere overcoming of their mass and inertia must have been accounted a wonder, she never really knew. Perhaps nobody really knew; perhaps not so much men as forces had accomplished that task. In some of its aspects the concern was a huge amalgamation of mercantile companies, mostly railway and shipping; in others it more nearly resembled a Government Department. But she knew that Jim knew all about it. Jim, Mr. Stonor (Mr. Whitlock's junior) told her, and Sir Julius, had planned the whole enterprise. Acting alone, Mr. Stonor said, Jim might have done the work and then have been shouldered out of the rewards by such bustling men as Robson, of the Board of Trade, George Hastie and Sir Peregrine Campbell, and others to whom Louie had lifted up her eyes when she had kept the appointment-books for the photographer in Bond Street; but Sir Julius had seen to that—trust Sir Julius! Sir Julius could cut a throat smiling with the best of them; if Jim was the genius, Sir Julius was the impresario of the enterprise. And by-and-by, from the frequency with which Sir Julius and other potentates said, when puzzled: "What d'you suppose Jeffries would do?" or "Why the deuce isn't Jeffries here?" Louie came to much the same conclusion. 302

At first she was set to work with twenty other girls who, each sitting under a porcelain-shaded incandescent that burned all day long, tapped typewriters in the back part of the building that looked down on the white-tiled well; and for some weeks it was a question whether she kept her job or not. For she was dreadfully inefficient, and daily expected a reduction to the level of the girls who, with rigid "dolly-caps" clamped round their heads, manipulated the rubber worms of the big telephone switchboard. But again her improved French served her turn. Miss Lingard, who sat in Miss Levey's chair behind a screen twenty yards away, was absent one day; Mr. Stonor haled Louie off to Sir Julius's room; and Louie, following Sir Julius and a Frenchman from one to another of the spring-roller maps with which the room was lined, took down in English short-hand a conversation in French about the boundaries of some concession or other. It was a badly botched job, but it was initialled and passed; and Sir Julius, who did not so much open doors and place chairs as allow it to be discovered that doors were opened and chairs placed exactly when they should have been, looked at Louie, thanked her, and presently sent for her again. One night she had to wait on him after dinner at an hotel, to make notes of certain conversations; and perhaps Sir Julius noted the little dipping of Louie's mouth when she was summoned from the ante-room where she had been kept waiting. She wondered whether he had expected she would turn up in a dolly-cap. A little after that he asked her out to dinner, without any business excuse at all. Presently she was wondering whether she would have to walk out of the Consolidation or else to tell Sir Julius Pepper not to be a fool. 303

It never came to that; exactly how near it was to doing so, Louie never knew. It was her Uncle Augustus of all people who saved the situation. His name came up; Louie could not restrain a sour little smile; and "Do you know Lord Moone?" Sir Julius asked. "Oh yes," Louie replied. That was all. Sir Julius's charming smile never varied. But the case was altered. Amanuenses of sorts are one thing, ladies with private information about the peerage another. Perhaps Sir Julius was a little of a snob. At any rate, he did not allow his little gallantries to interfere with business.

So Louie became a quite superior writer of Pitman's shorthand. The weeks passed. Jim still remained away.

Nor had she any news of Kitty Windus, of Miriam Levey, nor yet of Evie Jeffries. She still, however, remained good friends with Billy Izzard. It was from Billy that she heard, one night in April, something that filled her with a vague and ineffectual trouble.

She had gone up to his place in Camden Town, intending to spend an hour or so with him; but five minutes was all the time Billy had to spare for her. He was just off to Victoria to meet a fellow, he said; if she was going that way they could go together; and she needn't think he was

going to leave her in the studio to steal his sketches. "One of our heroes just come back from South Africa, a fellow called Lovenant-Smith," he said. "Coming?"

"I'll go with you as far as Charing Cross," said Louie.

Before she left Billy at Charing Cross she had learned quite a lot about his friend, Mr. Lovenant-Smith. There was nothing especially heroic about Roy's homecoming; no doubt his work had been useful, but it had not been fighting; for a year and a half he had not left Cape Town. He had now 304
come into money, and was handing in his papers; he would hunt and manage his estate somewhere down in Shropshire. "I shall go and stop with him," said Billy. "I only hope his horses are better than that old yacht he nearly drowned the pair of us in." And at Charing Cross he left Louie.

Roy was back home, then.

Well, it made not one atom of difference. Jim away was all to her, Roy in England nothing. No doubt it was wicked.

So much the worse for Louie.

Then, not a week later, Jim returned from Egypt.

But he returned only to go away once more, this time to Scotland. She saw him, for just one moment, coming out of Sir Julius's room. He was very brown, but much thinner, and he had a new overcoat. He went straight on to Scotland that day. Mr. Stonor said that he intended to stay there for the rest of the summer. "Overwork, of course," said Mr. Stonor.

So yet another absence in her story of absences began.

She filled it chiefly with work. She rarely got home before ten, and, save on Saturdays and Sundays, had to leave Jimmy entirely to the young woman who had succeeded Céleste. Billy had left town, and had probably gone to stay with Roy in Shropshire. Of Councillor Causton she now saw little. She wished she could save more money. Jimmy was now five and a half years old.

Then, in October, Jim returned from Scotland. Louie half expected that it would be she who would have to leave now, but this did not happen. Not that she saw much of him; he did not come until eleven, and went home again for tea. Sometimes, after he had left, she or Mr. Stonor had to 305
ring him up at his house in Well Walk, Hampstead; for the rest, he remained in high seclusion. She was glad it was so. A half absence such as this had not all absence's pangs, nor was his half presence too much perturbation; she could take a command with calmness, and she had nothing but commands to take. She knew by this time that he had a second child, a little girl, and that seemed definitely to close and bar the door against any wild and lawless hopes she might ever have entertained. And so things went on until early in December.

The thing that entirely changed their course may have seemed an accident to Jim, but a little reflection made it plain enough to Louie. She had not seen Evie Jeffries since that afternoon when they had met at the step of the bus opposite the Adam and Eve; and Evie's whole face and manner gave the lie to the story she told when, at a little after three o'clock one afternoon, Louie came upon her in the counting-house of the Consolidation itself. Near the table with the calculating machines Louie heard a clerk whisper: "Mrs. Jeffries!" Forty pairs of eyes were furtively watching her over desk-rails and glass screens. Some of the clerks even made errands in order to get a better view of her. If she wanted her husband she had only to ask to be taken to his room at once, but she stood, a slender figure in new black furs, by a waiting-room door. Then, seeing Louie, she almost ran to her.

"Oh, how are you?" she cried, in an acquired voice, touching Louie's hand then dropping it again. "Really, this place almost terrifies me! I came to fetch my husband home to tea—the car's outside —but of course I know I'm early. I'd such a lot of shopping to do, but I got through it quicker than 306
I thought. Well, how are you?"

It seemed to Louie that she did not do it very well; the manner of the *grande dame* was the last thing she ought to have attempted. As Evie put up her hand as if it held an invisible quizzing-glass, Louie wondered whether she had come primarily to see her husband at all.

"Really, this is stupendous!" she said. "I wonder if you could show me round—that is, unless I'm interfering with your duties? Do tell me what these things are!"

They were the mechanical calculators; her comment on them was: "How quaint!" Followed by eyes, Louie took her to the lifts; she said they must have one like that put into the new house they had taken in Iddesleigh Gate. "It used to belong to Baron Stillhausen—you've heard of Baron Stillhausen, the famous diplomat?" she said. From the lifts Louie took her to the department where the girls in dolly-caps pulled at the snaky telephone plugs. "Oh," she exclaimed, "so *this* is where you talk to my husband in the evenings from, is it?"... Louie had a little start.... She answered, however, that the private line was in another place, and led the way. No, Evie Jeffries oughtn't to attempt this kind of thing; her touch was too heavy. She told more about herself than she ascertained about anybody else. As they left the private line Louie somehow had the impression that Evie Jeffries was counting the paces from Louie's chair to her husband's room.

She returned to her own place slowly. She wished Evie Jeffries had not come. Her coming seemed all at once to have diminished Louie's composure; it was as if a closed question had been

clumsily opened again. "Where do you live? I should like to come and see you," Evie had said, as they had parted at the door of Jim's room; and that was odd, since for quite a number of years Evie Jeffries, had given no sign that she wanted to visit her. Kitty Windus, yes; Miriam Levey, yes; but she had not wanted to see Louie Causton. But she wanted to see Louie now, and had come that afternoon, Louie was now convinced, expressly to see her. Why? Had Jim been talking? Had Kitty and Miriam Levey been talking? Louie did not know. She only knew that she had been settled and at peace and was now so no longer.

And through it all shone an unquenchable recollection—the recollection of how she had once stumbled upon Evie Soames, not in wonderful furs, asking for her lordly husband, but dressed in a skirt and blouse, cheek to cheek in a dark back room with a fancy-stationer's son.

Evie would never forgive her that discovery.

With all the elasticity gone out of her, she resumed the work she had left half-an-hour before.

But as she lay in bed that night in her little flat, Louie ate her heart out again. She hated Evie Jeffries. She had remembered, too, an old, old slander—the slander to know the truth about which Kitty Windus had come to the Nursing Home in Mortlake Road. Was it that that had brought Mrs. Jeffries to the Consolidation now?

Louie tossed and tossed. Oh, she cried vindictively, if it only *had* been so.... But to have to submit to the indignity of Evie's jealousy and not to be able to give her grounds for it! And Mrs. Jeffries wanted to see her flat! Well, she should be welcome. Louie would hardly be at the trouble to lie about things, but every stick of furniture in this place in which Jim had never set foot might silently lie for her if they would! Would that be to drag Jim in? Well, let him be dragged in; a 308
woman with a husband like Jim, to be jealous! Why, with Louie ready and glad to lose her soul for him, he was the very egotist of faithfulness! He could not be virtuous without damning Louie with his grave and candid looks! She could almost have laughed at him. When all was said, such virtue was a byword, and the story of Joseph a thing for a quiet smile! Then Louie's laugh became a cry aloud, that woke Jimmy. Jimmy went to sleep again, but she was no calmer.

Bitter as spurge was that old story of hers now, and bitterer still the only moral lesson it now appeared to her to have. Oh, no doubt there was a deal to say for their conventional morality, but a pretty moral lesson it was, after all, that you repented of a history with one man only when it forbade a second history with another! And she swore again that that first history should not have stood in her way; more, far more than that was his own headstrong virtue, and perhaps that was not all either. She had been born for him, she knew it; he had had never a secret from her save those large open secrets that scarce a woman shared with a man yet; his hands, that could take life for love, were made to hold her. She knew it in her soul.... But huge as it was, he didn't see it. He allowed a pretty face to blind him to it all. "Oh, come, come!" she had called to him on the only night, of all those nights, when he and she had walked together; and his answer had been to take himself away. When she had kissed his shoulder she had merely kissed the spot where another woman's head had lain.

Oh, if that slander *could* only have been true!

She looked at, and almost tossed aside unread, a letter that came for her in the morning. Not for 309
a single moment had she slept, and she wanted no letter from Roy—for it was from Roy. Still she might as well read it. She did so.

Billy Izzard was with him; it had come out that Billy knew her, and he wanted to see her. "I've come back for you," the letter said, "and I'm not going to let you go this time. Do write when I can come and see you. Off out now, but do write." She threw it into the fire. Marry Roy? She would far rather commit another sin than such a reparation. The trouble was that she could not commit the sin.

That morning she was sent for by Jim. As she turned the handle of his door she was ready to make a bet with herself about what he wanted her for. She was not mistaken. He wanted to thank her for showing his wife round the day before.

His wife—always and for ever his wife.

"If you feel that you must——" she said, biting her lip with humiliation and passion.

"It's merely——" he rumbled heavily on....

As if she needed to be told what it "merely" was! If he cared to hear it *she* could tell *him* what was "merely" the matter with his wife!

"Oh, must you?" she said, quivering under the torture. He was playing nervously with a pen.
"Must I what?" he said, not looking up.

"Must you do this?"

He looked up. "Shut the door," he said. "Now——"

She listened to him almost scornfully. Again harping on that informal execution, as if he had been right and not right, and as if it now mattered one straw whether he "told his wife" or not! He was 310
saying something about a doctor; the doctor, Louie gathered, had said she mustn't have another shock; what had Louie—always and for ever Louie—to say to *that*? Louie clutched at her skirt

with both hands.

"Don't you know?" she said, clenching the skirt hard.

"I do not."

"Then ask me again and I'll tell you," she threatened him.

"I do ask you."

Well, if he would have it.... "She's jealous," said Louie.

The smile that stole slowly over his face set her almost beside herself. Even Potiphar's wife was probably not smiled at. Louie cut short the easy words that accompanied the smile.

"Then if she isn't, why does she want to come and see me at my home?" she demanded.

With quite remarkable clumsiness he pretended he had known his wife wanted this, and smiled again. She stamped on the ground.

"My good man——" she broke out wildly....

What she said she did not remember very clearly afterwards. It was spoken less to him than to ease her own breast. With nothing to give her, he still could not hold his tongue nor restrain that smile when she told him his wife was jealous. Jealous?...

Yes, and with a jealousy that could now never pass away! For, out of absences, silences, refusals, virtues, smiles, everything, Louie had, after all, secured something that all the smiling in the world could not take away. She *had* the secret he had feared to share with his wife. She *had* the 311
answer to every riddle in his riddle-haunted eyes. His wife *had* grounds for her jealousy, after all, had she but wit enough to know where to look for them. But she too was hopelessly behind. She too was smelling at cold scents—telephones and visits to flats. She suspected a gross infidelity, and never dreamed of the existence of one so fatally searching that the other would have been a mere incident by comparison with it. Little dullard, how should she? Her conception even of jealousy was as limited as everything else about her; a call or two on the private wire at night, and she was found asking questions at the Consolidation the next day.

And suddenly Louie saw—fool that she had been not to see it before!—why Evie Jeffries wanted to come to her flat. It was not to see the place and its furniture. It was to see Jimmy.

Oh, if her boy could only have had eyes like a young lion!

VI

When Kitty Windus had come to Mortlake Road and had refused to sit down until Louie had told her the truth about the wanton slander that had linked her name with Jim's, Louie had dismissed the matter with amused contempt. But now there seemed something rather terrible in it. Its author's stamping-out notwithstanding, for Evie Jeffries it appeared still to live. What had brought it up anew Louie could not as much as guess, but there it seemed to be.

"So that's it?" she muttered to herself. "In that case I may certainly expect to see you again soon. You won't say anything to your husband; he'd only smile and disbelieve his eyes and ears if you 312
did—his powers that way are really tremendous; but you'll probably go to Miriam Levey, who's rather a gift for these things, and Kitty'll back her up, and you'll make out your case one way or another. Very well. When the water's troubled there's the best fishing. *I'm* not above certain things now; good gracious, no! I'll find a reason for ringing him up to-night, and if you go to the telephone yourself so much the better. And you'll be round to see me at my flat before very long."

Evie delayed to come, but Louie knew the reason for that. Jim was moving into his great new place in Iddesleigh Gate. That would take a little time. Well, there was no hurry. When she did come Louie would be ready for her.

Did she still hope, if those waters could be sufficiently troubled, for a catch? Was she in her heart now as resolved to wreck the peace of Jim's household as formerly she had been to preserve it? She could hardly have answered the questions herself. It was Evie, not she (she told herself), who was going the right way to make a mess of things; nevertheless, she had only to remember Jim's smile to feel the tigress stretch itself within her. The loved fool! Could he go all lengths for love without thinking that a woman might do the same? Louie could not kill, as he could, smoothly burying the consequences afterwards, but she could do other things; and she was not sure that she couldn't kill too. Ten words, it appeared, would do it. Jim, who did not fear murder, feared those ten words; well, men feared one thing, women another, that was all. She had only to open her mouth where Jim kept his shut. 313

The only thing was that it did not seem a very sporting thing to do. Jim had taken his risks; she would be taking none. It was not much, perhaps, but it was enough to give her pause.

In the meantime she continued to ring Jim up frequently on the private telephone.

It was on the second Saturday afternoon in April that Evie at last paid her visit. Louie had sent out Rhoda, Jimmy's nurse, for the afternoon, and was herself setting out with the boy for one of

their precious jaunts. They were half-way down the four flights of stairs when she heard somebody ascending. She and Evie Jeffries met on the second landing, where the charwoman ceased to whiten the edges of the stairs.

It seemed to Louie that Evie Jeffries must have a sort of lucky-bag of greetings into which to dip. She could hardly have been surprised to meet Louie on Louie's staircase, but she drew a wrong one for all that.

"Well, this is a sur—a pleasure!" she cried. "You see, I promised to come, and here I am! Don't tell me you're just going out!"

"No; we were only going to the South Kensington Museum, and I was in two minds about it. Come up, won't you?" Louie replied.

At first Evie wouldn't hear of it, but even as she spoke she had ascended another step. They went upstairs again, and Louie put her key into the lock. "You'll excuse me a moment, won't you?" she said, as Evie entered. "In there's my sitting-room."

And she herself, turning along the passage, entered her bedroom and took that old study of Billy Izzard's from its paper wrappings. She hung it up on its old nail. If Evie Jeffries wished to see her 314
flat she should see her flat. Then she returned to the front room that looked away over the trees and houses to Earls Court.

"So this," said Evie, as she entered, "is your little boy!"

"Yes, that's Jim. Won't you sit down? I'll put the kettle on and we'll have tea."

She went into the kitchen, filled the tin kettle, and set it on the gas-ring.

Evie was dressed in an exquisite coat and skirt and an expensive and wrong hat; silk linings made whispers whenever she moved; but Louie, who kept her good clothes for the Consolidation, wore the battered old grey felt hat and long grey coat in which she had passed from studio to studio. But she knew that Evie envied her her distinction of motion. Evie's figure was pretty and "stock," charming but with no surprise—that of a demonstrable beauty. And the acquired tones had come into her voice again.

"How ripping up here!" she approved. "Such a splendid—view! I wish we had a view like it in Iddesleigh Gate; but as I told my husband, even money can't buy a view in London. Delightful! Have you the morning sun?"

"That's in my bedroom," said Louie. "How did you come—by car?"

"No; I felt that I needed the walk. Really people will be forgetting how to walk soon. Well, at all events, he's a beautiful boy!"

Louie saw no reason why she should not say, in the simple French which may more or less be assumed to go with large houses and cars, that she preferred that the boy himself should not be 315
told so; and then she went into the kitchen again to smile. She remembered Burnett Minor: "Voo affectay feele!" she murmured softly. Then she made tea.

"I suppose you're not quite settled yet?" she said, returning with the tray.

"Settled! Why, it will take us months!" Evie purred.

"Of course. It seems very odd to talk over the telephone, though, to a place you've never seen. Sugar? Is this place at all like what you imagined?"

Again came the ready-made answer: "Oh, it's really quite too delightful!" It was a pity, Louie thought, that Mrs. Jeffries had not had the advantage of a few minutes' talk with Mrs. Lovenant-Smith before coming to see her. The Lady-in-Charge at Rainham Parva might have warned her.

But Louie knew that already her very chairs and mats and brown-papered walls were silently whispering to Evie Jeffries. She might talk of Iddesleigh Gate, but she was thinking of nothing less than of Iddesleigh Gate. Perhaps she had been reassured in the matter of Jimmy's eyes, which were as blue as Roy's, but her own eyes were taking in everything for all that. Let them. Louie wondered whether, did she turn her back for a few minutes, her visitor would question the child.

"The Amaranth Room?" she presently interrupted Evie's flow to say. "Have you really a room called that? How lovely it sounds!"

"Nearly fifty feet long, my husband says; why, it has to have three large fireplaces, as well as the radiators, but of course there's steam-heat all through the house. It's delicious, not to walk into cold patches all of a sudden. And all the windows on one side are double, so that the place is 316
perfectly quiet. You must come some time. Of course," she took herself up, "our other house was quite a poky place; my husband never really settled there; but at Iddesleigh Gate, he says, he can really stretch himself."

Louie meditated for a moment. Then: "What's really been the matter with him?" she asked. She knew that Evie would probably not believe she didn't know; for that reason it was better to ask.

But she got no information. It was overstrain, Evie replied lightly, and then on the top of that he'd slipped one night and caught his head on the corner of a fender. He'd slipped because he'd been

really fagged out, what with starting the Consolidation and one thing and another. "But he looks all right now, don't you think?" Evie asked.

"Perfectly, I should say, from the little I see of him."

"Of course you mostly do Sir Julius's work, don't you?"

"Mostly."

"It must be great fun for you, being taken out by Sir Julius sometimes. My husband told me that."

"Quite amusing."

"Miss Levey was never taken out like that!"

"No? Have you seen her lately?"

But again Louie got little information. Included in what she did get, however, was a lie. Evie reported that Miss Levey, now at some Women's Emancipation League or other with Kitty Windus, had actually been going to write to Louie to suggest that she, Louie, should apply for her old place. Louie gave a little nod. Of course Miriam Levey, rather than own to defeat, would pretend that she had left the Consolidation of her own accord. Louie rose. 317

"But perhaps you'd like to see my place?" she said. "Not that I think you'll find it very amusing. But you can see it if you like."

"I should love it! Is Jimmy coming? Do you know, Jimmy, I've got a little boy like you, but not nearly as big?"

"Has he got a helmet like mine?" Jimmy demanded.

"No; but I think I shall have to get him one."

"You stay here, Jimmy," said his mother; and she led the way to the kitchen.

Evie praised the kitchen and its meagre appointments, and was then shown the bathroom. "It hasn't a crystal bath," Louie said, "but it does to wash in." She lingered in the bathroom a little; she was thinking of another bath and certain old jokes about brown-paper parcels. Then, first showing Evie the bedroom that had been Kitty's, she passed to her own room at the back.

Against the wall on the left lay Jimmy's bed; her own was across the room, with its head under the break of the mansard roof. The little built-out window, from the glass sides of which rows of chimney-pots could be seen, faced the door, and over the fireplace on the right, full in the light, hung Billy's study. It was the second thing on which Evie's eyes rested. Louie was careful not to look at it.

For in that place at any rate she was going to strike; the rest might fall out afterwards as it would. As she turned away to pat Jimmy's pillow she was suddenly fighting white; the little creature had come for it and should have it. And she should have it swiftly and without warning. 318 Even as Louie had turned her back her heart had given a leap....

For up to that moment it had been always possible that Jim had not spoken of his intrusion into Billy's studio that evening; but there was no doubt now! Jim—or perhaps Billy Izzard—had told her. Probably Billy. Probably Billy first, and then, seeing she already knew, Jim. All at once there rushed upon Louie, as she passed from Jimmy's bed to her own and smoothed the coverlet of that also, what had happened later that same evening, when her arms had supported a collapsing Jim in a Swan Walk doorway and she had passionately called him: "Come, come! Come, come!"

She spoke quietly; quietness was so much more destructive.

"This is where I get the morning sun. But it's very windy. The wind blew that picture you're looking at down the other day." Then, without either pause or change of tone: "By the way, that's what you came to see, isn't it—that and my boy?"

Simultaneously with her blow she was commenting to herself: "That's good-bye to you, Sir Julius; she'll see I don't come back to the Consolidation after that; will you have Miss Levey back again, or will you try her friend Miss Windus? I don't think you'll offer Miss Windus an—er—increase of wages. As for me, I suppose I can sit again; nothing matters now. Or there's a plainer way still ——"

The next moment she had called sharply: "Go away, Jimmy, till I call for you! Go and look out of the window for Rhoda!"

Then she turned and faced the woman who had taken two quick, running steps towards her. 319 Insolently she smiled into her eyes.

"That was it, wasn't it?" she said.

Mrs. Jeffries did not fight white. The blood had thronged to her head until her very lips seemed swollen; Miss Levey could hardly have spoken more thickly. She spoke, too, in a passionate ellipsis than which Louie's own five words did not go more straight to the heart of the matter.

"Oh, you would if you could—I've known that a long time!" she cried. "Wouldn't you just—rather! You'd do it if it was only to give *me* one for myself! *I* know you."

Louie thought she rather liked her for making a fight of it. She still smiled. "Then that was it?" she said.

Evie flushed even more deeply. "You didn't suppose I didn't know all about that absurd meeting, did you?" she said, with a still darker flush.

"Dear me, no. I've known for weeks that you 'knew'—if we mean the same thing. Perhaps we don't, though. Anyway, I can quite understand your wanting to see for yourself. Miss Levey can't tell you everything."

Evie's inability to speak for mere fury was so evident that Louie, after watching her for a moment, continued:

"As for that picture, naturally I wanted to keep it. I'm sure you'll see that for yourself."

Here Evie flamed. "'Naturally!'" she broke out. Louie gave an almost humorous shrug.

"Well, surely it's natural?"

"Natural!... As if his coming in wasn't the merest accident!"

"Oh, I know that; but what *are* you here for then? And now that you *have* been and seen, what can you possibly do about it?" 320

Evie's lips seemed as thick as if a bee had stung them. She broke out again.

"'It!'—I like your 'it,' Miss Causton or Mrs. Causton or whatever you call yourself!"

Louie coolly smoothed the folds of her blouse. "By 'it,' I mean, of course, my loving your husband," she said. "As you guessed, I knew that you knew about that picture. But it's really a much older thing than that! I don't quite know how old; while you were still engaged to somebody else—as old as that anyhow. And as it's purely my affair, and even he can't stop it, I wonder what *you* can possibly do!—I'm 'Miss' Causton, by the way."

Louie had almost a genius for these last words that could be taken up; she smiled again as Evie, taking them up, said: "Oh, *are* you!"

"Well, I don't think I need be longer than I like, but that's neither here nor there. The important thing at present is whether you were wise to come to-day or not. I wonder whether you'd let me give you a piece of advice?"

And that, as Evie still stood speechless with rage, might be described as the end of the first round. There was a long pause during which the two women stood looking at one another. Then the second round began, with a rapid exchange of half sentences.

"Advice! Thanking you very much for your kindness——"

"Oh, please don't raise your voice; they aren't double windows here."

"Advice is cheap."

"Far from it, believe me." 321

"You common——"

"Sssh, ssh, ssh! Your husband wasn't above asking my advice——"

"I'll take very good care——"

"Please—there are other people in these flats."

"Well, is noise anything new here?" said Evie grossly.

"Oh, you really shouldn't say those things!"

And again they fell back, as it were, for breath. It was Louie who presently resumed.

"I don't in the least know why I should want to advise you," she went on. "I'd no intention of doing so when you came into this room, and to be frank I still half hope you won't take the advice. But you'll please yourself about that. It's this. Don't be a little fool. Go home, and don't tell your husband you've seen me at all. If you do you'll make a sad mistake. You say advice is cheap; well, this isn't; it's fearfully dear. It's not the first time I've tried to help you, and I really haven't strength to do it any more. No, don't try to think of fresh names to call me either; already you've called me common and told me that the tenants here are used to hearing angry wives, and one can have too much of that. So go home, and say nothing to your husband about where you've been. Believe me, it'll be quite the best."

It did in truth cost her more, far more, than she had intended to pay. The greater fool she, she told herself, but—she gave a quick, defiant glance round the bedroom, as if her eyes sought somebody who dared to meddle in her affairs. She would be a fool if she wished; who should stop her? This jealous little scold had fair warning now; let her take it and go while there was yet time. Louie had all but spoken her former *fiancé's* name once; with much more provocation she might 322 forget herself and involve Jim too in a catastrophe of ten little words; and she wanted to do the sporting thing after all. Let Jim's wife take her fill of that canvas of Billy's, then, and go. Her eyes were glued to it now. As she looked Louie exulted; it *had* been so—precisely so; not all Evie

Jeffries's looking could alter that fact....

But suddenly, as if even in this gratification and triumph lurked a peril best avoided, Louie strode to the canvas, took it from its nail, and set it on the floor by the little fireplace with its face to the wall. She had felt the tigress stretch again. To put that thing out of sight was the safest thing to do. She turned to Evie again.

"Please go," she said. ("Yes, mother's coming in a minute, Jimmy.) You see, he's calling me. Forgive my turning you out like this, but do, do go, and don't tell your husband where you've been. Good-bye."

But Evie Jeffries seemed to suspect that Louie was merely "coming it over her" with something indefinable, essential, not to be acquired. After all it was she, this shabby, grey-eyed woman, who wrote shorthand for a weekly wage, and herself, Mrs. James Herbert Jeffries, who lived in the mansion in Iddesleigh Gate. Perhaps she felt herself challenged; at any rate she plunged her hand into her lucky-bag once more.

"Oh, there's no need for such a hurry," she said frigidly. "For one thing, I'm a little particular about who I take my advice from. You needn't think I don't see you're just shutting me up?"

Louie was almost hushing, soothing. "Then let me shut you up. You've seen all you came to see; if there's anything else you want to know, ask me, quite quickly——" 323

And Louie, in her eagerness to get rid of her and to remove herself from danger, almost gladly submitted to what Evie said next.

"Oh, of course, if you've—an appointment," she said, with a toss.

"Yes, I've an appointment—you understand," she answered, with a little shepherding movement of her hands.

But the next moment that too had turned into something else.

"Oh, you little fool!" Louie broke out, suddenly seeing. "You don't suppose I'm trying to get you out of the way so that I can meet *him*, do you? Good gracious, woman, he's never set foot in this place in his life, and I'll see he never does! Perhaps I wanted you to think he had—I don't know what I thought—with one and another of you I'm getting almost past thinking—but that's the truth anyway! *Now* are you satisfied? Or have you got the idea so thoroughly into your stupid little head that nothing will shake it? If you're going to spend your Saturday afternoons going round to every place you think might possibly——"

But the denial counted for nothing. Evie turned haughtily.

"Who's making the noise now? And why should I believe you? I knew before I came you'd say that ——"

"Oh, how you try me!... I *do* say that. There's nothing else to say. Do you think if it was any other way I shouldn't boast of it, to you or anybody else? Why, how *can* you know so little of him—not to speak of myself——"

"You needn't talk as if you hadn't already had the cheek to tell me you loved him!" 324

"Did I? Upon my soul, I sometimes don't know whether I do or not! Say I don't—say I lied—say I sometimes almost hate him as much as I do you and you me."

"Oh, very likely, the grapes being sour," Evie scoffed.

"Then if they're sour——? What more do you want? Isn't that enough? And isn't it more than enough that I let you stand there and tell me so? Oh, I'm doing my best to warn you—you'll make a great mistake if you make me *try* to get him!" She stamped. "*Won't* you go?"

Evie too stamped. "Oh yes, I'll go, and so will you, I promise you—from Pall Mall——"

"Anything you like—only go——"

But as Evie took a step towards the door a little accident turned Louie suddenly as white as paper. Billy's study leaned against the wall; Evie's skirt or foot caught it as she passed; and the canvas fell. Evie gave a short laugh and pushed it with her shoe.

The dear symbol, nay, the very evidence of so many dreamings, that poor thing of wasted smiles and sighs and tears, the pearl from the heart of the oyster-grey——

A kick of her rival's shoe was treatment good enough for it——

It was as if the hives of her own breasts and the heart beneath them had been trodden on.

Louie stepped slowly forward. "No, stop," she said.

She stood for a moment looking down at the picture; then she spoke slowly.

"You were quite right to come," she said. "You have reason to be jealous."

Evie affected not to hear, but she heard. Louie continued:

"A moment ago I told you not to tell him you'd been here. Now I want you to tell him. He may 325

even be expecting it. You see we have spoken of it, he and I."

Evie Jeffries seemed about to say something, but "Just one moment," said Louie quietly——

She placed the picture against the wall again, face outwards. She did not display it as a taunt now; it had served its turn. As if Evie's looks had cheapened it, she no longer wanted it. She stood looking at it.

"It was the last time I sat," she murmured to herself.

Even that pale shadow of a bridal was to be taken from her.

Well, let it go.

This time it was her own foot that kicked the canvas aside; then like a flash she turned—Louie at her deadliest.

"I suppose you're aware you've lost him, whether he knows it yet or not?" she demanded truculently.

Again she was grateful to Evie that she stiffened up against her. Evie smiled.

"Oh, that way—'whether he knows it or not'—nobody minds *that* kind of losing! *That* wasn't what you were trying to make me believe a few minutes ago. Thank you very much for the tea, not forgetting the advice," she went on, "and if I might return the compliment, I should like to give you a piece of advice too. You say you could get married if you like; I'd jump at that if I were you! You see, there's your boy. Quite a well-behaved little fellow he seems—quite a superior child—and now that I've seen for myself, I'm perfectly satisfied, thank you!"

"Then," said Louie, advancing, "I'm going to spoil your satisfaction. Listen to me." Her eyes were like saucers of ice. "You've lost your husband. I'm not going to tell you how, but I'll tell you how you can find out. You can tell him what he wouldn't believe when I told him—that you're jealous. 326
You've reason; ask him what it is. If he doesn't tell you, he daren't; if he does—ck!—it's all up between you. Do you suppose," she said slowly, "that *you're* the kind of woman men tell things to? You, who can neither trust him nor be trusted by him? You, who spy on him when his back's turned? You, who listen while a miserable little Jewess makes mischief for you—for I guess Miriam Levey sent you here? *You* think you love him? Look at me, I say"—she rapped out the words like a command—"listen, and I'll tell you *my* idea of loving a man! I've messed my life; if you were anything but what you are you'd know that if you wanted to hurt me your way wouldn't be to point at my little boy and look round my bedroom as if you expected to find pipes and overcoats there! Oh, that's not the way! The way would be to let me see what a perfect marriage could be; there might be tears in my eyes then! But what's this you show me instead? Oh, I know what your marriage is without telling. It would take you and a woman to make a wife for a man! And what would mine have been if I hadn't thrown my chance away? What should I have said if I'd seen what you think you've seen? Listen! I should have said: 'Go, if you like; find a woman if you can whose love's like mine; search the earth for her; I give you leave, and I shall be waiting for you, just the same, when you come back and say there isn't one!' But had *you* thought of that? Not you! At a word you're off, asking whether this and that's true, because you don't trust him; and so he gives his trust to somebody else! That's what you've lost—and you don't even miss it, you know so little of love!" 327

Evie had fallen back against the wall, a little intimidated by her vehemence. She did not understand, but she seemed to apprehend that there was something she did not understand. Louie broke out anew.

"*You* know love! And when and how did you learn it, pray? As you learned your shorthand and things (oh, you're trying hard to forget you ever knew them!) at that place in Holborn? Why, you failed in your petty little examinations there; do you think love's easier? Something you get out of a text-book and answer a paper on? Your husband might know if you don't! *He* knew just what those other lessons were worth, but he doesn't seem to know that loving has a genius too—that one in a million has it as a gift and the others mimic it as you're mimicking people in your dress and talk now! And you call *me* common—me, who told your husband long ago what his only, only chance was! Oh, I mustn't say any more or I shall say everything! And you toss your head and say: 'Nobody minds that kind of losing!' That's your idea; that's what you really think! Why, your mind wants a window as badly as that little dark back room at your Business College.... Oh, it maddens me, the sheer waste! A necklace of love—pearls—and good gracious, a bit of cheap glass in the middle of it! Yes, I mean you."

She was walking rapidly up and down; she struck the rail of Jimmy's cot with her hand as she passed. Evie, cowed, watched her from the wall. Louie stopped before her.

"What do you *do* for him?" she said bitterly. "What do you *give* him? What do you *bear* for him, suffer for him? Don't whimper—tell me—you've made pretty free with me—put that handkerchief away and tell me——" 328

But instead of putting the handkerchief away, Evie burst into loud sobs. Louie watched her remorselessly. Tears, of course—no doubt that was the way she managed Jim——

"That's no good with me," she said harshly. "I want to know what you do for your husband besides following him about and asking questions about him."

Evie's hand moved as if for a chair. There was none. She lifted her head, walked across the room, and fell across Louie's bed. Louie still watched her unmoved.

"Well?" she demanded again, after a quarter of a minute.

Muffled in the bedclothes, Evie's voice came.

"I give him all—all I—have. You talk as if—as if—I'd no right—to be on the earth at all."

"Well?"

"Oh, you do—you do! How—how can I give him more—than I've got? Oh, you think you know, but you don't—you don't know what I've gone through—you've never had that horrible morning—when I was to have been married—and I never expected Jeff to propose, but he did——"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, get up!" Louie cried.

"He did—one day—and I said No at first, but he caught hold of me.... And even then I was jealous about Kitty—I know I'm jealous—but he told me afterwards that I needn't be jealous of poor Kitty because he'd only done it because he thought he couldn't have me—I know I'm jealous—it hurts sometimes so that I can only cry and cry——"

Louie hadn't wanted this at all. Again she cried: "Oh, get up!" but Evie continued to sob. 329

"And then when Jeff saw you—that night—at Billy's—it was worse than ever, but I kept it from him. I'm not like you, Louie—it's no good my telling myself I don't mind—even though I knew it was all an accident it was like a knife——"

"Oh, don't lie there like that!" Louie muttered.

"And then Miriam Levey reminded me of that thing Archie had said—but he's dead now—and I know it was absurd, but I did think he liked you. You've—such ways, you see—I expect you've been a governess or something in swell houses—I've got to learn them too, now, but Jeff says I'm really very quick at it——"

Louie was pacing the floor now, but more slowly and with downhung head. This was the very last thing she had wanted. More than ever she hated this unresisting piece of pulp; but strike again she could not; no, not with Evie's soul as it were a naked picture for her to set her foot upon. And unless she did strike it was now quite, quite final. To take it lying down! Gladly she would have goaded her into a fresh show of resistance; contemptuously she would have told her to stand up and fight; but the child—Louie felt her to be a child, and herself a faded woman—was merely beyond all decency exposed. Louie only wanted to cover her up again as quickly as possible—her confessions, her abjectness, her appalling artlessnesses, her humiliating appeals. She was beginning to sob once more.

"Oh, don't go on like that; do get up and pull yourself together!" Louie snapped.

"I do love him—I haven't anything else to give him—except my life—he could have that—you couldn't give him more than that——" 330

"I could stop blubbering for him," said Louie curtly, resuming her walk.

Yes, it was final. Evie had overcome; Louie now backed out of the whole affair. If Jim liked to tell her of his own accord, well and good; it still seemed the only way out; but what was the good even then? Evie Jeffries would no more acquire love as Louie understood it than she would ever acquire the *nous* to preside without betrayals at Jim's table at Iddesleigh Gate. And if Evie had lost Jim, so had Louie. By her silence she was relinquishing him now. She saw his image recede, slowly, slowly, as if it had been indeed that ship of her fancy, outward bound, her own vessel already condemned for breaking up. Yes, the ship was drawing away. The eyes of her spirit tired of watching it; surely now she might turn them elsewhere; but no—there it was still, very small, leaning, no doubt, to a brisk breeze, but hardly appearing to move.... No, it was not gone even yet; that sudden anguished searching for it was but a trick of the eyes; it was still there—a speck ——

And it had only needed six words: "James Herbert Jeffries killed Archie Merridew."

Suddenly Louie herself sank to the floor by Jimmy's cot. Evie heard her sinking. She rose from the bed and ran to her. But Louie cried aloud and put up her hand.

"For God's sake don't touch me—go now—and say nothing."

The touch of Evie Jeffries would have been more than she could have borne.

"Mother, there *is* a gentleman!"

It was Jimmy's voice outside the door. 331

Slowly Louie rose to her feet. "Very well," she called shakily; "talk to him till I come. Please go at once," she added to Evie.

Evie began: "I'm sorry I said——"

"Oh, do you want me to strike you?"

"Can't I—do anything—for you?"

"*Go!*"

She heard the outer door close behind Evie Jeffries. By that time her eyes were straining at a wide and empty horizon....

VII

§*a*

What followed when, after a few minutes during which Louie bathed her face in the bathroom, she entered her sitting-room again, fell mercifully flat. Any visit would have been an anti-climax; a visit now from Roy—it was Roy—was even welcome for that reason. If she must see him, best get it over.

He was sitting on a rush-seated chair with Jimmy between his knees. Jimmy was playing with his watch. Save that the rims of his stolid porcelain-blue eyes were pinkish, as if with suppressed tears, he had not greatly changed. He wore a braided morning-coat; his silk hat, stick and gloves lay on another chair. His watch slipped from his boy's hand and dangled by its chain as he rose. His voice carried Louie instantly back to the carpenter's shed at Rainham Parva.

"It's me, you see, Louie; here I am, like a bad penny, always turning up." 332

Louie spoke listlessly. "How are you? I'll get you some tea."

A minute later, with a "May I come in here?" he had followed her into the kitchen. He merely got in her way, if she could be said, in her complete exhaustion, to have a way at all. She was cutting bread and butter.

"Louie, old girl," he said piteously over the bread-board, "why didn't you—tell a fellow?"

Louie did not answer. Then Roy chirped up a little, as if something might now, past all discussion, be taken for granted.

"Well, this settles it," he said. "Clinches it entirely. You know what I mean."

Louie did know. "Just take the kettle off, will you?" she said.

"So you see that's settled—clinched," said Roy, quite bustling. "Right you are. The only question now is; how soon can you pack up."

"We'll talk about it presently, if there's anything to say. There isn't, though. Will you carry the tray in?"

Jimmy ran straight to his knee again. "May I give him some jam?" said Roy; and then he added to the boy: "Oh, come, don't mess yourself up with it like that!" Louie remembered his account of the accident with the centre-board: "Jam and all the lot!" but she did not smile.

"Rhoda will be here in a few minutes, then I'll have a short walk with you," she said. "I've nothing to say, though."

Presently Rhoda did come in, and Louie put on her hat and old grey coat. They went out and walked slowly across Eelbrook Common towards Walham Green. There she told Roy that his 333
return could make no difference whatever. "Don't talk such stuff, Louie," he said; "sit down." They sat down on a bench on the side of the common past which the District Railway runs and talked.

The air rang with the shouts of poorly clad children at their Saturday afternoon play; the common was a-crawl with urchins. Into Roy's honest, statue-like eyes tears had come; none came into Louie's. She only shook her head.

"You're only lacerating me," she said.

"But, Louie——"

"You want to lacerate me?"

"But—the little chap——" Roy said presently, with a gulp. "Will you tell a fellow how you manage?"

That Louie did not mind doing, more or less. "And now I must go back," she said, rising.

"I'll walk back a bit of the way with you. I'm not going to let you go like this."

At the little drinking-fountain she stopped. "Don't make it harder," she said. He had been indicating the rabble of children.

"But look at 'em, poor little beggars!" he said. "Dash it all, I'm not just blowing off—I *could* do such lots for him—he could ride—and shoot—and fish—and I've a corking little pony at grass now." He mentioned these things one after the other, slowly, as they occurred to him.

Louie groaned inwardly, but aloud she said: "Please don't come any farther. Good-bye."

"But I may come again? You see, I jolly well know I could persuade you."

"N-o——"

"I shall, though—you bet," Roy announced. 334

She left him, wondering whether it would have made any difference at all had he, in asking her to marry him, told her once, even once, that he loved her.

But she did not return home. Instead, she walked past the block of flats, crossed Putney Bridge, and sought her old Nursing Home in Mortlake Road. As a drunkard might pant for a drink, so now in her extremity she wanted to hear gaiety and laughter and talk. Though she paid for it in prostration afterwards, she felt that without some such intermission she could never get through the night. And to-morrow was that dead day, Sunday. Further than that she did not see; beyond the anodyne of an ordinary human laugh she did not inquire. It seemed to her a matter of the last moment to herself that Miss Dot and Miss Cora should be at home; if they were not, she felt that she must walk straight into a public-house, as a man might, and get herself something to drink.

But Miss Cora and Miss Dot were at home; they had just come in from a matinée. They made an onslaught on Louie. Had she seen the piece? Oh, the funniest thing! They really had had some luck at the theatre at last! The last time it had been a slum piece, all heartstrings and gutter-snipes; and the time before that—would Louie believe it!—just when they had expected to see frocks and dancing and suchlike, the curtain had gone up on a dentist's parlour! Two half-crowns for seats in the pit for that! It was almost like paying money to go and see another Nursing Home!

"But give the poor girl some tea—what are we thinking of!" said Miss Cora.

"No, thanks—I've given two people tea this afternoon already," said Louie. "Tell me about the play." 335

And, both speaking at once, they told her about the play—*such* a frock as Ellaline Terriss had worn!—an e-*nor*-mous pink hat, pink like a rabbit's ear, and a frock, chiffon over pink satin.

Ah! That was better!

"But where's my bonnie boy?" Miss Cora demanded.

"Oh, let's show her the new one, the little Crowley baby!"

The little Crowley baby was brought in....

"May I invite myself to supper?" Louie asked by-and-by.

"Oh, do stop!"

"Then give me some stout or something. I'm not sleeping very well."

"Oh, we'll see that's all right——"

And when, at ten o'clock, Louie left, it was with a sleeping preparation in her pocket. She took it in bed. It did its work. Half Sunday had passed when next she awoke.

On the Sunday afternoon she went with Jimmy and Rhoda to Bishops Park; then, packing them off home, she crossed the bridge again and took the bus to Buck's. At Buck's she again stayed until ten, and she smiled as, on the way home again, she remembered the little party to which Chaff had once taken her, pigtail and all. If Chaff had had a little party that night she would have invited herself to it; it would have been something to do. Although it was half-past eleven when she reached her own door she was not in the least tired; had she not slept until well after midday? She walked back to Putney Bridge again. There a man spoke to her. She wondered what he would have said had she stopped; it would have been amusing to know. She felt that she had not had enough amusement. She wished she could have gone back to the Business School in 336
Holborn again. That had been amusing. Mr. Mackie had been very amusing. One of his songs, he had said, that about the Gorgonzola Cheese, never failed to create merriment.

She hummed as much as she could remember of the air of it as she walked, and took two more of Miss Cora's sleeping-tablets before going to bed.

She found, too, an entirely unexpected amount of amusement at the Consolidation on the Monday morning. Not that everything was not much as usual; the routine was the same; but a quite comic spirit seemed to pervade the whole place. Lacking a Mr. Mackie, Sir Julius, dapper and perfect in his aplomb, who had thought of asking her to be his mistress but had found a more profitable use to put her to, seemed somehow as funny as needs be; she wondered she had not noticed it before. It happened that Mr. Stonor had to rebuke one of the telephone girls that morning; there was diversion in the way in which the girl tossed her dolly-capped head and told him that she would talk to her "boys" if she liked. Quite right; that was the way to take things, as a joke. And Mr. Whitlock was portentously funny over a nought or so that had strayed into a pile of figures; and the glazed screen that marked Louie's superiority to the other girls in the same room seemed inanimately funny, and Jim himself was funny, when you came to think of it, sitting invisible there in his room with people coming and going all the time, as if the earth would have ceased to revolve on her axis or the sun have omitted to rise if Jim had not rung bells and jotted his initials on his bits of paper. And funnier than everything else was the fact that Louie should be there at 337

all. She laughed outright when, at nine o'clock that night (she had been kept on account of some urgent joke or other), she stepped from the upholstered lift and out into Pall Mall.

Again she wished that Chaff had had a little party somewhere. Jim, she understood from Mr. Stonor, was giving a party presently, not a little one, but a large, probably a screamingly funny, one. But its humour would probably be lost on Jim. Jim did not always see jokes; that was where Jim had made the mistake; he needed somebody to point them out to him. His wife, being part of the comedy herself, naturally could not do so; she cried when she should have laughed; she had no "kick," no "buck," in her. It was a pity, for Jim needed these things, and ought to have married a woman who had them. Well, it was rather late, but not too late for Louie to go into a shilling gallery somewhere. To-morrow, if she could get away early, she would go up to Camden Town and see Billy. Billy was a joke too, spending whole, real days in making artificial coloured shapes on canvases or solemnly scratching his copper plates. One of the best things Billy had ever done a woman had humorously kicked aside with her foot. That showed what these things were worth in the big, big world. Of course a sense of humour was really a sense of proportion. The dreadful lack of it showed when people magnified trifles so. Yes, she would go and see Billy to-morrow. To-night, the theatre gallery.

She found Billy on the following evening, still etching, the humorous fellow, but amusingly grave too. Perhaps he had heard, or guessed, something from Roy. He was dissolving the ground from a plate; Louie wondered what the curiously sweet-smelling fluid he was using was; and then she 338
remembered. She had smelt that same smell when Jimmy had been born—which event also, by the way, had been the consequence of a lark. She remembered, too, the wonderful, releasing sleep that heavy-smelling stuff had given her. It might be rather a useful thing to know where to find that stuff; it was necessary to Louie's enjoyment of the world and its humour that she should sleep at night. It struck her as a very happy chance that chloroform should be used in the practice of etching. She admitted that it was rather a shame to steal from Billy again, but she felt that she now needed that wonderful, releasing sleep even more than when Jimmy had been born.

An hour later she left Billy's with the ribbed blue bottle in her pocket.

The remainder of the week also was gay; so was the next week, though perhaps with a slightly diminishing gaiety. But the level was restored again when Roy once more turned up at her flat, again on a Saturday afternoon. Really she could have laughed, as they say, fit to split. Roy, who seemed to think that you could ask a woman to marry you without the—formality, call it—of telling her you loved her! It was not for Louie to spoil the sport by pointing out the inessential omission. Not that she hesitated at all now; she had only to think of how it might have read in the paper: "At Saint So-and-So's, on such and such a date, by a Reverend Statue, assisted by another Reverend Effigy, a Tanagra Figure, to a trodden-on Painting by Billy Izzard," etc., etc. Oh no. That wasn't loving——

There was no doubt that Roy loved Jimmy, however; and that was perhaps a little more serious. He had handed in his papers; he could provide for Jimmy; there was riding, and shooting, and 339
fishing, and the corking little pony; but ... it was impossible, of course. Jimmy was Louie's and nobody else's. If Jimmy must play on Saturday afternoons with the rabble on Eelbrook Common, well, he must; Louie would do all for him that she could. It was a pity—especially about the pony. It disturbed Louie a little. It disturbed her, in fact, so much that that night she remembered something she had forgotten about for ten days and more—the blue ribbed bottle she had stolen from Billy. But as she had left it in her drawer at the Consolidation she had to sleep as best she could without it. Perhaps it was just as well. It was not a good habit. She wondered whether Billy had missed the bottle; she would go up again and see, taking that old painting with her. That would square accounts a little. Certainly it was a shame to loot Billy like that.

She went up to Billy's with the study. Billy received it absently. And she was glad that Billy had a code, for he was grave again, and seemed all but on the point of talking seriously to her, code or none. But it blew over. He asked her whether she'd noticed him with a bottle of chloroform one night; he'd lost one; stupid thing to be careless about; must be somewhere; had Louie seen him with it, cleaning a plate?——

"No," said Louie.

"Well, it may turn up. Thanks for the canvas. To tell you the truth I rather wanted it. Merely as painting it's—*knuk*!" Billy made a delectable little foreign gesture.

"I'm no judge of things as painting," said Louie. "And—I say—Billy——"

"What?" 340

"I don't know that I haven't changed my mind about not sitting—if you asked me very nicely——"

But Billy looked gravely at her again. "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'd rather you didn't. I think I can manage. You'd do far better——"

He looked hard at her, but the code held.

"To do what?" said Louie.

"Well, not to sit," said Billy, turning away.

Louie felt ridiculously touched; nevertheless, much as she liked his loyalty, she wasn't going to

talk about Roy. "Thanks, Bill," she said simply. "You're a good sort." And there the matter dropped. Neither for Billy nor for anybody else did she ever sit again.

It seemed strange that so slight a thing as an indisposition of Mr. Stonor should obscure the mock-sun of Louie's gaiety as if a vapour had crept across it; but so it was. Occasionally urgent messages were taken to Iddesleigh Gate at night; usually Mr. Stonor took them; but one day Mr. Stonor left at lunch-time and did not come back that day. Sir Julius himself, who had had dinner sent in that night from a restaurant, sent for Louie and gave her certain papers and instructions. As soon as she learned the errand she asked whether nobody else could go instead. She invented an improbable engagement.

"I'm sorry," Sir Julius said, "but I want Whitlock—I shall have to wait here myself till you come back. If you could go, and give them to Mr. Jeffries himself—nobody else——" That was as near as Sir Julius ever came to a direct command.

So, as Evie Jeffries had seen Louie's home, Louie was now to see hers.

She went reluctantly, by bus, changing at the bottom of Park Lane. For days she had not seen 341
Jim; she did not want to see him now. Therefore, though go she must, she would not sit down; she would not lift her veil; she would be in and out of his house again as quickly as ever she could. She passed the Marble Arch, and at Lancaster Gate got down and walked. She reached Jim's vast and tomblike house.

At the word "Consolidation" the man who opened the door said: "This way, please," and led her along a low-lighted hall, round a staircase the outspread double wings of which resembled some huge alighting architectural bird, and along a narrower passage to the library. At the touch of a switch the room broke into a softly masked glow of light. "Please to sit down," said the servant; but Louie stood by the great writing-table, looking towards the door. Evie had taken stock of her dwelling; Louie looked only towards the door of Jim's library.

Then, as the door was opened, she pushed up her veil after all. Jim came in.

He placed a chair for her; she still refused to sit. She continued to stand even when it appeared that the papers she had brought would require some examination. As she stood, a bell, not unlike that of a muffled telephone, sounded for a moment and then ceased. It was followed by a tap on the door.

"Come in," said Jim, without looking up.

Evie Jeffries entered, dressed as if for a State ball.

Even had Louie not seen her face, the touch of her hand would have told her what had happened. Evie was back again exactly where she had been; the only difference was that she now hated Louie the more that she had abased herself before her. Many times on that other Saturday afternoon Louie had begged Evie to go; now she longed to fly herself. After another minute Jim 342
put it into her power to do so. He rose and returned the signed papers.

"Thank you," he said, and added, turning to Evie, "I don't know whether Miss Causton's had supper?"

Evie's face lighted up as artificially as if there too a switch had turned up masked lights.

"Yes; won't you let me have them lay a tray for you, 'Miss' Causton? It won't be any trouble," she said.

"No, thank you," said Louie. "Please don't come to the door, Mr. Jeffries."

He came, however.

"Good-night," he said, as the door was held open for her to pass out.

"Good-night," said Louie.

She remembered afterwards that she noticed, out in Oxford Street again, a sandwichman bearing an illuminated board with the announcement of some concert or entertainment upon it. Pasted across the device was a strip of paper with the words "To night" upon it. The date was the sixteenth of May. At midday on the day following, Louie, coming out of Mr. Whitlock's room, saw Jim advancing as if to come in. He saw her, stared hard at her for a moment, paused irresolutely, and then turned abruptly and walked away again. She watched his back, shaped like a church-door, but bowed as if with a load too great for him, disappear in the direction of his own room. He had made no attempt to conceal the deliberate avoidance. She half expected, though she knew not why, that he would send for her presently. He did not. She was infinitely glad. Something, she was perfectly sure, had happened between him and his wife. It was the first time 343
he had not sought her aid. Had he, now that it was too late, told her? Had he realised that it was too late to tell her? Had he, realising this, determined to take his last risk and to tell her nevertheless? Or had something happened that had at last unsealed his eyes so that he now saw with a clearness as merciless as that of Louie herself?

Louie could not tell. She only saw his face again, the face of a man suddenly old as he realised his defeat, and his disappearing back, hunched under a burden that was crushing him at the last.

"If I were you, Miss Causton, I should leave early to-night," said Mr. Whitlock that afternoon.

Louie looked up inquiringly from her desk.

"Oh, if you *want* to make it a matter of conscience! But Mr. Jeffries is giving a party to-night, and both Sir Julius and I will be leaving early."

He nodded pleasantly as he dropped his hint, and left her. Louie resumed her work.

It was a report of phosphate deposits, but it had been worked over before and needed little attention; or at all events it got little. At five o'clock Louie gathered the sheets together and put them into the drawer of her table. As she did so some object at the back of the drawer knocked. She thrust in her hand. It was the forgotten bottle of chloroform.

"I'd better throw that down the basin," Louie muttered.

"I think, Mrs. Jeffries, that you and Roy between you put me a little beside myself for a day or two. Much better not to have things like that lying about; to have 'em's sometimes to use 'em. I'll throw it away now." 344

But as she was rising, one of the telephone girls brought her a cup of tea and a biscuit, and she closed the drawer again. The girl began to talk. She was Ivy Warner, the operator who would talk to her "boys" over the telephone if she wanted. Louie, as a matter of fact, always admired the skill with which she did this. A yard away not a word would be audible, and yet Miss Warner would be carrying on a flirtation in Brighton or Bournemouth under the eye of Mr. Stonor himself.

"Well, how's Harold?" said Louie, smiling over her cup of tea.

"Oh, not at all pleased with himself; backed three winners to-day, one at thirty to one, a gift; like to see him? He's coming up this evening," Miss Warner replied. "I'd a chin with him a quarter of an hour ago; dinner at seven-thirty, at the Troc; no steak-and-fried and a small dark lager when a thirty-to-one creeps home! He's bringing a friend, too; a dasher, Harold says; he's almost afraid to introduce him; and Daisy says she really must give her steady a show to-night. Know anybody?"

Louie thought for a moment. It was a thing she had never done before. She gave Ivy a sidelong look. Again she had the hunger to go somewhere, to see lights, hear music, smell the cigarettes of men.

"Do you care to take me?" she said.

Ivy was surprised. "You?"

"Oh, not if I should spoil sport——"

"Rather not! Do come! What a lark! I'll get on to Harold again now. You really mean it?"

"Yes."

"Good egg!" cried Ivy, glad to make up her party and to improve her relations with her business superior at the same time. "I didn't really want Daisy, you see. Of course they do talk loud at the 345
Troc, but Daisy's just a *ti*ny bit ... well, a perfect stranger had the cheek to come up to our table and speak to her the last time——"

Ivy ran jubilantly off to ring up Harold again.

Louie told herself it was a stupid thing to do; she was getting into the habit of loitering about late at night, heedless of Jimmy. But she had promised, and would go. If she didn't she would only be mopishly thinking, and, after all, she would be no more out of place with Harold's dashing friend than Evie Jeffries would be in another place much about the same time. Perhaps the dasher for Evie and Jim's guests for herself would have been more fitting, but no matter. She would be a dasher too. She wondered how Ivy was describing her dashing self to Harold over the telephone.

At seven o'clock she made herself ready and left the Consolidation with Ivy.

She retained no very clear recollection afterwards of the gaieties of that evening, but the little she did remember arrested her a little. She had a confused impression of the lights and tables and pilastered walls of the Trocadero as of a bright beckoning vista, stretching before her as the white road stretches before the knapsacked and stout-booted walker. She knew that many girls went that way.... The air was heavy with the smell of coffee, smoke, dishes, scent; Harold's friend was a Hebrew "killer," and reminded her of Miss Levey; noisily he claimed the privilege, which Harold noisily disputed, of paying for everything; and the waiter contemptuously accepted a tip of a sovereign from him. Perhaps he was the same cavalier who had resented Daisy's loudness; at all events he appeared to find in Louie's quietness another—or perhaps the same—meaning; and 346
Louie had to move her chair and to change her attitude at the table. Afterwards they went to the Alhambra; it was Ivy who cried out at the sight of two cabs and refused to go unless they all went together. At the Alhambra Louie was afraid she was rather a wet blanket; she declined to "take a walk round" and remained seated in her stall; but Harold's friend was fickle as well as dashing, for by-and-by she had a glimpse of him with another lady, who had not dined with them at the

Trocadero. She wondered how Evie Jeffries had got on—or "got off," to use an expression of Kitty Windus's.

Suddenly—perhaps it was this thought of Evie elsewhere that did it—she got up, sought the cloakroom, and walked out of the place. She went home, once more quietly and steadily thinking of that vista of lights and cigar smoke and laughing mouths and gilded pilasters—the way so many girls went.

The row she expected with Ivy in the morning was not a moment delayed. It began in the lift in which they both happened to ascend together.

"Good-morning," said Ivy stiffly. "I hope you got home in good time last night."

Louie waited until the liftman had clashed the doors to behind them; then, "I'd a headache," she said.

"Well, perhaps it's better than having one in the morning," said Ivy, more icily still. "All the same, there is such a thing as playing the game when you go out with people."

"I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have come," said Louie, walking with the angry girl to the telephone exchange, where the lights on the great switchboard came and went like the sparks at the back of a gate. They were coming and going with great rapidity that morning. 347

"Oh, *much* obliged for your company, I'm sure," Ivy broke out, "but——"

"Sssh!" came from a girl who stretched the rubber worms.

"Sssh yourself, Daisy Dawson—time you knew how to speak into a phone by this time!" snapped Ivy.

But another and a louder "Sssh!" came from another girl, and suddenly Mr. Stonor's head appeared in the doorway.

"Quiet there!" he rapped out, and withdrew his head again.

"Sssh, Ivy—haven't you heard?" Daisy Dawson said softly.

Ivy's own voice dropped. "What?" she asked quickly.

"About Mr. Jeffries."

"No—what?"

Mr. Stonor came in again—but not before Louie had heard Daisy whisper the word "dead."

Suddenly she remembered the face of the liftman. She clutched Mr. Stonor's arm. He looked at her. There was no need to ask.

Dead!

Slowly she walked to her own table behind the screen.

The place was at once busier and more hushed than usual. Presently Mr. Whitlock passed. Mr. Whitlock was thirty-five; he looked fifty. Louie only asked him a single question: "Is it in the papers?" He nodded and passed on. She sought a messenger.

It was on the right-hand middle page. It had happened at one o'clock in the morning; cerebral hæmorrhage. That very evening he had given a dinner-party; followed a short interview with Sir Peregrine Campbell, one of the guests; but Mr. Robson, of the Board of Trade, had declined to be seen. There would be no inquest. Heartfelt sympathy was extended to his widow. Half-a-column of "career" closed the announcement. The early edition of the evening paper for which she sent out had it all over again. 348

Dead!

Another absence!

Slowly she turned the paper and began at the beginning again.

Jim dead!

That night Louie fetched Jimmy from his cot into her own bed. It was not, she felt, for comfort for herself; she had a strange feeling that she ought to be comforting Jimmy. Jimmy slept, but, her eyes alternately very widely open and very tightly closed in the dark, she whispered to him.

"Well, we've got to look after ourselves now," she whispered to the sleeping child. "I don't think we care to go and see him, do we? I daresay she wouldn't refuse it, but we won't go. That was his wife, who said she'd a little boy like you, and of course we're all very sorry for her. She did give him all she had; she said she'd die for him; but of course that's only a way people have of speaking when they mean they love somebody very much. Nobody wants her to die for him really; that would only be two dead instead of one; and she won't actually die.... And she'd a sad thing happen once before. Nobody ever knew about that really except me and him; she didn't know; if she did she might die really then. People have to be careful, they say, when they've once had a 349

terrible shock. It's rather funny though, Jimmy, that mother shouldn't feel very much of a shock. Of course I didn't expect it, but as soon as it happened it seemed as if it had been bound to happen. That's queer—and I don't know that I wouldn't have preferred the shock."

She continued her curious consolation of the sleeping boy:

"Poor Jimmy—poor mother! He looked beaten yesterday—done—but I didn't think.... One never does think till afterwards.... Ah, but mother did, once, a long time ago! Mother danced with him once, and knew then—and the next time she saw him Jimmy was quite a big boy. If she could only have seen him a few times in between, she doesn't know what she could have done, but she would have done something, and then by-and-by he would have blessed her for it—she's sure, quite sure he would.... And there she was, with some terrible people at a music hall——"

She choked a little.

Even had it been proposed to her, she did not think she would have gone to see Jim. That was another woman's affair; Louie's part in him had nothing to do with what remained now. Not that she was so absurd as to tell herself she had lost nothing; even when it is only yours to look at, or perhaps to put your arms about just once, a body counts for something; but the other woman had had nothing but that. "Nothing but" was perhaps a queer way of putting it; for that "nothing but" Louie might perhaps have given all the rest; but all the same it was not very much her business now. Her business now, like the other woman's, was to jog on just the same, the one in her empty 350
mansion, the other one it didn't much matter where. Again she whispered to Jimmy.

"How thankful I am that I didn't tell her—something! Oh, I don't think I could bear her to die for him as she said she would! And I do hope he's not been so foolish as to—leave anything about; anything that might tell her, I mean; she can't bear what I can bear. But he wouldn't. He wouldn't cover it all up so cleverly to go and uncover it himself. I always knew it would happen if that insect got in his way; Jim wouldn't think twice about it, except how to make himself safe.... Was it Kitty Windus who told me that about him—about his father having been an English merchant captain and his mother a Corsican woman he found dancing in a sailors' café in Marseilles? If it wasn't Kitty I dreamed it; mother's done a most foolish lot of dreaming; but it must have been Kitty. They say they do that kind of thing in Corsica. I shall never know.... Well, it doesn't matter.... Poor little Jimmy...."

She deliberately tried herself, to see whether she was capable of emotion about him. She seemed to be quite incapable. "I'm simply callous," she thought.... She tried several days later, on the day of his funeral; the words she repeated to herself had no meaning for her; "gone," was merely a thing of four letters, "never" one of five. The word "absence" she quite failed to understand. She heard that Mrs. Jeffries was prostrated, but quite as well as could be expected in the circumstances. Perhaps Mrs. Jeffries too was repeating the words "gone" and "never." Louie wondered whether she would marry again. It would not surprise her.

Well, if Evie Jeffries could live, Louie could live. 351

A piece of news, however, which she had from Billy Izzard one night—this was three weeks later, but her stony insensibility had not changed—filled her, she could not have told why, with a quite different disquietude. It appeared that Billy had felt himself permitted to call on Mrs. Jeffries, and had found her (so he told Louie) busy with her husband's private papers. Sir Julius also had been there, to advise if advice was necessary; and Sir Julius had been of opinion that the painful task would be more quickly over if Mrs. Jeffries would have a number of papers that were written in shorthand transcribed by a clerk, if a trustworthy one could be found. "In fact, he mentioned your name," said Billy. But it appeared that Mrs. Jeffries knew some shorthand, had other reasons, and so forth. She had refused to have the papers transcribed. Naturally they had not said much with Billy there, who, indeed, had not stayed many minutes; but he had gathered that the papers formed some sort of a journal.

Louie felt her flesh grow queerly crisp. This, by the way, was in a little restaurant not far from the Palace Theatre. Louie had had three consecutive nights at home, and felt that a fourth would kill her. She and Billy were going to the Palace afterwards.

"A journal?" she said slowly.

"Well, Pepper rather thought a novel of some sort; I'd a talk with him afterwards; but I suppose he only knows what Mrs. Jeffries tells him. It wouldn't surprise me in the least that poor old Jeff dabbled a bit in that sort of thing. I'm quite sure he'd have made a painter. One of the big sort he was, the Titian, Leonardo, Cellini sort—the big men, who can take an art or so in their stride." 352

"What made Sir Julius think it might be a novel?" Louie hoped that her new agitation did not show.

"My dear girl, you know as much about it as I do."

"And it was in shorthand?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"His own?"

"I'm sure I can't say. It was in his desk though. Why?"

"And you say Mrs. Jeffries is reading it herself?"

"Well, when Pepper suggested you—and a Miss Levey, I remember, whoever she is——"

"Miriam Levey? Yes?" Louie said, with a jerk.

Billy looked hard at her. "What's the matter?" he said abruptly. "You're as queer as Mrs. Jeffries herself was about it."

"She was queer? How, queer?"

"Oh, I don't know. How can one describe things like that—just impressions one gets?"

"Did she strike you as queer because she'd perhaps read some of it?"

"Well, I understand it was private——"

"You mean she *must* have read some of it to find that out?"

"I suppose so."

Again Louie had that curious crawling of her flesh. She hesitated for a moment; then, slowly:

"What sort of terms are you on with Mrs. Jeffries, Billy?"

Billy stared. "Oh, quite all right—I don't understand——"

"Have you any influence over her?"

"What sort of influence?" 353

Louie hesitated again. After all, it might be only a fear. She went on. "Say influence enough to advise her about reading that journal, or novel, or whatever it is?"

"Lord, no!" said Billy. "I was his friend, hardly hers, you see."

"Well, if it could be put as a matter of friendship with him?" Louie was speaking almost feverishly now.

"I wish I knew exactly what you meant," said Billy.

"Order me another cup of coffee. That's what I can't tell you, because I don't know myself. But let me ask another question. Do you happen to know whether there are any real names in this thing, whatever it is?"

"Really, I——"

"Just a moment. I'll tell you why I asked. If this is a journal, and has names of people in it, the chances are mine's there."

Billy was quick enough. He nodded. "I see; at least I think I see. You mean about his coming in that night and Mrs. Jeffries possibly not liking it? Well, to tell the truth I don't think she did much. I could have bitten my tongue out when I'd told her; but I suppose everybody doesn't look on these things quite as we do. You mean in a word—excuse me for putting it rather stupidly—that she's jealous and thinks she can find out the truth? Supposing there was any 'truth' to find out, I mean?"

"That's the idea. Of course there was no 'truth.'"

"Well? Why not let her discover that and make her happy, poor thing? You see, he was her husband."

Louie winced, but continued. "That's all right as far as it goes; but if there's one name there are probably others." 354

Billy looked sharply at her. "Other women? Jeffries? Don't you believe it!"

"I didn't say women."

"What then?"

"I can't tell you. And perhaps I'm altogether wrong. But if I'm not wrong, Billy," she said earnestly, "and you've any interest in Mrs. Jeffries at all—say interest enough to want to spare her a shock—she oughtn't to be allowed to read that journal—always supposing it is a journal."

Billy gave a short laugh. "Really, Louie! Is this the Surrey or Sadlers Wells?... You're not serious, are you? Of course it's bound to be painful for her at the best, but she's getting on very well—better than we could have hoped."

Louie made a little despairing gesture. "Well, I can't tell you any more."

"Well, if it's as important as all that, why don't *you* tell her?"

"I couldn't do that either. Look here, Billy, couldn't you find out about this for me?"

"Oh, dash it all—how can I?"

The saucer of Louie's coffee cup was full of ashes; she added another butt and reached for Billy's case. She looked Billy full in the eyes as he struck a match for her.

"Do you go much to Iddlesleigh Gate?"

"Well, just at present, you see——"

"I mean, *could* you go? Where does all this take place? In that library? (Yes, I've been once.)"

"Yes. At least that's where we were that night."

Still Louie looked steadily into his eyes. "Now this really *is* Surrey and Sadlers Wells," she said. "Could you get those papers out of her way—anyhow—so that she doesn't read them?" 355

Billy twinkled a little. "It takes a woman to do these things, Louie."

"Suppose without asking any questions, if you did I'd—marry Roy?" After all, to marry Roy would be no worse than anything else now.

The twinkle disappeared. Billy was grave again.

"I'd like you to marry Roy, Louie."

"Well ... is it a bet?"

But Billy only shook his head. This was all very well at the Surrey and Sadlers Wells, but——

"It's a physical impossibility," he said. "And if it wasn't, I wouldn't."

"That's final?" said Louie, looking into his eyes for the last time.

"My dear girl——"

Louie rose. "All right. Then we may as well get across to the Palace and see Marie Lloyd."

Could she have said more? She did not see that she could. The chance loomed tremendously large now that Jim *had* been fool enough to write things after all, and perhaps his wife was reading that journal, if it was a journal, even then——

Louie could not stop her—no power on earth could stop her. What Jim had evidently not told her during his life she would read for herself now that he had gone.

He would have done better to tell her.

But there: perhaps it was not a journal—— 356

ENVOI

"Er—Miss Causton," Sir Julius called—"can you stay for an hour or so? No, a private affair; I hope it's not inconvenient; thanks."

He was sickly white and tired-looking; Louie's feet dragged, and her brain was as stupid as clay. She was sorry for Sir Julius; *he* had had no preparation; as for Louie, it seemed to her now that she had been passing from preparation to preparation for such things for the whole of her life. This of the morning paper was only the latest of her fulfilments. The prophets, she thought dully, must have been very weary men.... But on second thoughts perhaps Sir Julius ought to have been sorry for *her*. Even shock is better than foreknowledge.

For of course Sir Julius wanted her to stay in connection with this of Mrs. Jeffries.

She had put on her hat and coat for departure; as if she walked in her sleep, she passed out of Sir Julius's room and removed them again. She bathed her face, but felt little fresher; then she returned.

It was about Mrs. Jeffries. It was about them both. Then Louie seemed to remember that Sir Julius had said something about an article on his deceased colleague for a Review. She supposed that was why he wanted her to take down his words in shorthand. Unless it was for the inquest. Gas-taps turned on, doors and windows sealed, and so forth usually meant an inquest; and they would not have far to look for her motive—suicide through natural grief. It was only that morning, but it seemed an old, old story already. 357

"'*Tragic Death of a Lady*,'" Sir Julius read out from a newspaper....

Well, he wouldn't want that part taken down; indeed, if he had only known what Louie knew, he would not have asked her to take anything down at all. But her notebook was on her knee and her pencil sharpened, and when Sir Julius had finished reading her hand began to write, purely functionally, of itself. It was no trouble to Louie whatever; nay, her hand was hardly called upon

more than her mind; the pencil itself did it. After all, foreseeing minds could be put to better uses than the mere recording of things after the event.... "Sad business, sad business," Sir Julius was saying; and "Sad business, sad business," the obedient pencil wrote. But Louie wondered whether it was so sad after all. Evie Jeffries had had a sort of foreknowledge too; "I could die for him; you couldn't do more," Louie remembered she had once said; yet it was doubtful whether she had died for love of him after all. Call it gas-taps, or the shock of discovering that Jim had been her lover's executioner....

Still, she had died, from whatever reason, and she had been quite right in saying that Louie could have done no more.

It was strange the way the pencil wrote of itself. "A page of notes in her husband's shorthand has been found under one of the pillars of the writing-table," it wrote, and it omitted, as if it had been endowed with Louie's own intelligence, Sir Julius's interpolated remark, "I've got that page of notes, by the way." Mr. Whitlock had described to Louie one day a contrivance called a tele- 358
writer; a pen dipped itself into a bottle of ink and wrote, unassisted, a telegraphed message; they were new, and they hadn't got them at the Consolidation yet; but they were putting them into some of the post offices, Mr. Whitlock had said. Her pencil moved like the pen of a tele-writer. She watched it, fascinated. It was writing as Sir Julius talked, about Jim now.

"—lived an intense crowded life too. I should say at a guess there weren't many things he hadn't done at one time and another, short of a murder or a matrimonial infidelity. Don't think he could have been tempted to do that. One woman could do anything she liked with him, but the others wouldn't have much chance——"

Very little chance, Louie thought. That, in a sense, had been the tragedy of it all. Louie knew more about that than Sir Julius; Louie had once said, "Come, come!" to him, in tones that might have brought angels from above and devils from below running for love, but it had not made a ha'p'orth of difference to Jim. Sir Julius seemed to be praising him for it; Louie was not sure that she could exactly do that; she could almost as soon have mocked him for it; but you neither mock nor praise a blind man merely because he is blind. It was funny that Sir Julius, with not very much to boast about himself, should set up an idol of faithfulness; and not just for somebody else to worship either; that was the funny part; men did that kind of thing; sinned, and yet worshipped, and called it "the maintenance of an ideal." They honoured Joseph, and winked when his back was turned. Perhaps they made much of him because of his rarity. Well, it was all the same to Potiphar's wife.... 359

But all at once something seemed to have happened to the pencil. It was tele-writing very furiously. Sir Julius was reading from another piece of paper; Louie fancied, somehow, that it might be the piece that had got wafted under the pillar of Jim's desk.

> "*—show him that red thing on the floor and that curved thing on the door.*"
>
> *But now Archie in his turn seemed to have become divided. He had turned suddenly white. But an habitual pertness still persisted in his tongue. I don't think this had any relation whatever to the physical peril he seemed at last to have realised he was in. I stood over him huge and black as Fate.... "Spare him if you can," that generous bloodthirsty devil in me muttered quickly....*
>
> "*Merridew," I said heavily, "you'll disappear to-morrow morning—or——*"
>
> "*Shall I?" he bragged falteringly....*

He seemed to have hanged him, then; "that curved thing on the door" evidently meant a hook. That was rather revolting; these were the things about murder that Louie had not wanted to know.

"Sort of grim tale he would write," said Sir Julius to the pencil; "and of course—*de mortuis* and so on—but he did marry the wrong woman. I suppose they're together again now."

Suddenly Louie put down her notebook and pencil. Her voice, too, as she spoke, seemed to her a sort of tele-voice.

"Will you excuse me just a moment?" she said. "I'm thirsty." 360

She went out. When she returned, three or four minutes later, Sir Julius sniffed once or twice and asked her if she had a toothache. She took up the pencil and notebook again. Sir Julius resumed.

"What was I saying? Oh yes, about his marrying the wrong woman.... But he was a mass of contradictions, and one of 'em was that he merely idealised her. Pretty, of course, but poor Jeffries could have done better for himself than that. She never could bear me...."

Louie felt no difference yet; she did not know how long these things took. For a moment she wondered what would happen after ... and then it struck her as foolish to wonder about a thing she would know so soon. She fastened her eyes on the pencil again. It went on writing, and Louie was thinking of her loved little Jimmy now.... She could not have done very much for him; he might even have grown up to bear her some sort of a grudge; Roy would adopt him; he would be far, far better with Roy. There was a pony out at grass for him now; he would ride and shoot and fish, and his father would send him into the army; and perhaps there was already a baby girl somewhere in the world who would one day be his wife—the right wife. "Was die Mutter träumt, das vollbringt der Sohn...."

It was far, far better....

"Well," the pencil wrote, "there's nothing to be said now, poor creatures.... Funny smell in here, Miss Causton; I'll smoke if you don't mind."

Sir Julius lighted a cigar. Its penetrating odour mingled with that of the sweet, releasing stuff.

Ah! It was coming! The pencil wrote no less quickly, but it looked a little smaller and farther away.

"But sometimes it made me almost angry that he hadn't married the woman he ought...."

Louie felt her head sinking.... Yes, the woman he ought....

That had been the real fatality....

Her lids dropped for a moment, and then heavily lifted again; but she could still see the pencil—mistily—dreamily—as if endued with a life not her own—flying on.

THE END

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