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BOOKS BY GUY WETMORE CARRYL

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# The Transgression of Andrew Vane

A NOVEL

BY  
GUY WETMORE CARRYL

*Author of "Zut, and Other Parisians"*



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# The Transgression of Andrew Vane

For the things ye do, when your life is new,  
And your sin is sinned with a smile,  
Ye shall pay full sore, ye men, though the score  
The Fates hold back for a while:  
Ye shall pay, at the end, for your frauded friend,  
For the secret your lips betray,  
For the lust and the lie, to the Gods on High  
Ye shall pay—ye shall pay—ye shall pay!

Ye shall pay ten-fold, with your heart's best gold,  
Ah, tempted women and true!  
Ye shall render account, to the full amount,  
For each beautiful thing ye do.  
For the youth ye yield, for the soul ye shield,  
For the pitiful prayers ye pray,  
'Tis the fancy of Fate that, soon or late,  
Ye shall pay—ye shall pay—ye shall pay!

## The Transgression of Andrew Vane.

### PROLOGUE.

For months past, she had felt that she was weakening, that the crescent wretchedness of five long years—an uninterrupted descent from level to level, on each of which the thorns of disillusion caught at, and tore from her, some shred of hope or self-respect—had done its work at last. Her courage and her faith, inherited, the one from the mental, the other from the moral, vigour of a rigid and uncompromising Puritan ancestry, were slipping from her. What the end was to be, she did not dare to ask; but it lay there ahead, grim and ominous, gradually taking form, through the mist of the immediate future. Its very suggestion of divergence from all that was familiar to her, of being even a degree more monstrous than what she had already suffered, sickened and appalled her, who had never known a dread of mere death, but drew back with unspeakable fear before the looming of this unknown, ultimate degradation.

John Vane had wooed his wife with the easy confidence born of adequate position, adequate means, and more than adequate ability. Four years of Harvard had taught him to believe life in the little Western town which had been his birthplace, to be, for a man of literary bent, a practical impossibility; and when he stepped easily from the halls of his Alma Mater into the offices of a Boston magazine, it was a practical renunciation of his early environment, and an expression of his resolve to follow in the actual as well as the metaphorical footprints of some of the greatest figures in American literature.

Six months later, he announced his engagement to Helen Sterling, the only daughter of a pioneer in copper, whose character had long since built him up a reputation, to which, later, the five figures of his income lent an added lustre. From first to last, from the occasion of the young collegian's presentation to the reigning belle of her season to the moment when she said, "I, Helen, do take thee, John"—and the rest of it—there was, by way of proving the rule, never a stumbling-block in the exceptionally smooth course of their love. They were made for each other, people said, and no one subscribed more confidently to this opinion than themselves.

But—and does ever a honeymoon pass without the uneasy awakening of that latent 'But'?—Helen was not a month older before she was forced to the unwilling conclusion that there was a singular, intangible something lacking in her husband's character. It was not that he was not gifted; for that, his most casual acquaintance knew him to be;—or in love with her; for of that he gave evidence almost as conclusive as would have been furnished by the ceaseless reiteration of that spoken devotion which a woman craves, without hope of receiving, from the man she loves. But things had come to him so easily, so independent of any effort of his own, that he was become the chief of optimists, imbued with the serene and confident *laissez aller* of the clan; and, now that association was making her intimate with his methods of work, she found them to be wholly haphazard, inspired merely by the whim of the moment, unregulated by any remotest

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[3]

evidence of system. His performances were the meaningless flashes and snaps of Chinese crackers, not the steady and purposeful, if less imposing, fire of a skilfully laid fuse, leading on to great results. His confidence in his own ability, in the certainty of his ultimate triumph, was so absolute that he was content with the minimum of endeavor, oblivious to the fact that only statues can remain thus passive with the assurance that laurel wreaths will be laid before them. He did not realize that the living must pluck their laurels for themselves.

Lacking the initiative which is its indispensable ally, Vane nevertheless possessed all the impatience of restraint or routine characteristic of the creative faculty. A year of editorial work was sufficient to convince him that it was not possible for such a temperament as his to be trammelled by fixed hours, and strait-jacketed by observance of detail. He resigned his position, on the plea of devoting himself entirely to writing, and there ensued a period during which he sunned himself in society's favour, and received his share of flattery in return for several trifles contributed to the magazines, but created nothing worthy even of the infinitesimal effort which he made. A man had to think, to arrange, to compose, he told his wife. Rome was not built in a day, and the mere manual act of transferring his thoughts to paper was a trifle, when contrasted with the process of incubation. So month after month dragged by, and little by little, as his novelty wore off, John Vane dropped out of society's consideration as a literary potentiality, and came to be regarded as nothing more than one of many good-looking, agreeable men-about-town, to whom, in the matter of his wife and his worldly wealth, the Fates had been generous beyond the ordinary.

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One of the first unmistakable signs of degeneration was his now constant complaint that he was unappreciated. The average man's share of applause is in strict proportion to his deserts. In Vane's case the allowance had been appreciably in excess of his due, but it was exhausted at last; and flattery is a drug which, with indulgence, becomes, a necessity. Deprived of it, he grew fretful and impatient, made occasional abortive efforts at performance of the great things formerly expected of him, and talked savagely of prejudice when his manuscripts came back from the editors, accompanied by polite notes wherein the pill of non-availability was sugar-coated with reference to the pleasure of examining his work, and the regret with which it was returned.

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For a time he had his wife's most loyal support and sympathy. She liked to believe that what he said was true, that literary excellence counted for nothing in a commercial age, and that a man who would not conform to silly superficial standards had no chance of recognition. But Helen was a woman to whom a goose was a goose, and a swan a swan, at all times, and regardless of ownership. Moreover, she had been a lover of the best in literature since first she had been given the run of her father's library, and sat for entire afternoons curled into a big arm-chair, skipping the long words of Thackeray or Charles Lamb. Her critical sense, thus perfected, was now too alert to allow of any treachery to standard. Intensely loyal she was, but intensely just, as well; and all her eagerness to believe her husband what he claimed to be could not blind her to the mediocrity, often the utter worthlessness, of his later work. With revelation arose, naturally, an ardent desire to aid him, and strict sincerity, which was her most admirable quality, pointed to candour as the only adequate means. With his resentment of her counsel came her first disheartening insight into the shallowness and perversity of his nature. That he could accuse her of attempting to belittle him, rank her as at one with those who misunderstood him, hurt her more keenly than if he had turned and cursed her. It was the parting of their ways, the first decisive step on the road which she was to follow wearily for five years of discouragement and disillusion.

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With the waning of his popularity Vane renounced Boston, as he had renounced his birthplace, and they moved to New York. Here, for a time, he contributed listlessly to the humorous weeklies and the less pretentious magazines; but reputation of the kind he sought was not to be won by mere facility in rhyming or in writing around a dozen illustrations; and, presently, he reverted to his old complaint of prejudice and non-appreciation. Then a chance acquaintance led him into speculation. Where abler men failed, John Vane was swept into complete disaster. In a transient panic, he was caught long of a big line of stocks, tried to average too soon, and was finally forced to let go his holdings at about the bottom of the market.

It was ruin, absolute and utter; but Helen almost welcomed it, in the belief that the spur of a necessity he had never known before would goad him to the achievement of better things. But the character of John Vane was not the stuff whereof is made the moral phoenix. He shrivelled before the fire of defeat, and sank hopelessly into the ashes of surrender.

They moved from their luxurious apartment to a cheap hotel, thence to a cheaper one, thence to a boarding-house. The backward path was strewn with unsettled bills, and loans never to be repaid. Vane wrote spasmodically for the daily papers, and for such of the magazines as would still accept his work, and, on the pittance thus earned, and the generosity of Helen's father, they contrived to exist, in a fashion, for something over two years.

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But, given the temperament of John Vane, the next development was inevitable. At first Helen sturdily refused to believe that a new demon had entered the hell which he was making of her life. She met him, at night, with an attempt at a smile, deliberately ignoring his unsteady gait, his sodden face, his hot, rank breath. But the evidence was plain, constant, incontestable. Drink had gripped him, and she knew too well that whatever of weakness laid hand upon her husband never relinquished hold.

So another year went by, the gulf between them widening and widening. Finally, he struck her—and then, or the first time, that final degradation, that ominous, unknowable end of hope and self-respect, loomed, hideous and shadowy, through the fog before her. Unable to interpret its significance, she told herself, nevertheless, that it was very near.

They were living in Kingsbridge, in a little frame house into which a man who had known her

husband in his Wall Street days had come, in settlement of a bad debt, and which he had offered them, for charity's sake, at a paltry annual rental. The same Samaritan had given Vane a small position in his office, and the latter now went to and fro, between the city and its gruesome little neighbour on the Harlem, taking leave of his wife with a curt, contemptuous nod, and returning, bloated and foul-breathed, to pass the evenings in a semi-stupor.

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The chance had been too good to be disregarded, but life under such conditions was no better than sheer existence. The cottage was one of a squat, ill-favoured row on a side street, within a stone's throw of the railway station. They had found it equipped, in a way, with cheap, yellowish furniture, worn and faded carpets, and kitchen utensils distinguished by the grime of many meals and the musty inheritance of insufficient washings. About the house there was a stale, moist smell of plaster, and the plot of turf in the little front yard was dry and discoloured, like the mats of imitation grass in the establishment of a country photographer. Helen had striven to redeem the desolation of the tiny living-room with the few pictures and articles of furniture which she had contrived to save from the wreck of their former fortunes; but the attempt was not successful. The rare prints were out of place against the tawdry wall-paper, and the few pieces of Sheraton and Chippendale to which she had clung took on, in such surroundings, the shabbiness of what was already there.

She was obliged to do her own marketing and cooking and housework, since a servant, in their straitened circumstances, was out of the question: and not the least part of her martyrdom was the purchase of scrawny yellow fowls, and vegetables of a freshness past, and their preparation in the dingy little kitchen, which left an odour of frying lard on the very clothes she wore.

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Vane had left her, an hour before, on his way to the city; and now, as the weight of depression became intolerable, she took her hat, locked the door behind her, and started for a long walk over the hill-roads back of the town. This had lately come to be her habit. It was something to escape, even for half a day, from the dispirited little suburb, with its sallow frame houses, its patched fences, and its cinder-strewn roadways, along which lean cats slunk guiltily, and dishevelled fowls picked their way in search of food. Up on the hills, the air of late November was keen and chill, and grayed with a drifting smoke-mist from distant fires of dried leaves. The brown grass was veiled here and there with thin patches of snow, stippled with faint shadows, cast by the filial oak-leaves, which cling longer than any other to the maternal bough. As Helen passed, squirrels darted nimbly away to a safe distance, and then sat up to watch her, with their fore paws held coquettishly against their breasts. It was all very sane and healthy, all in wonderful contrast to her morbid life in the shadow of John Vane's personality.

There had been no children—a fact which, in happier hours, she had deplored, but for which she was now profoundly grateful. There are things which it is easier to bear alone. To share with another—and that other her child—the humiliation of her ill-starred association with her husband, would but have been to double the burden's weight. In her own case the period of martyrdom was well-nigh done. For his son and hers it would simply be at its beginning, tragic in its boundless possibilities of shame.

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As the thought came of the motherhood thus denied her, she wondered why she had been faithful to John Vane. Once she had believed in him, and so strong had been this faith that some shreds of it yet remained, to bind her to him through all the unspeakably humiliating days of his gradual but inevitable degradation. Nor was her fidelity of the negative, meaningless kind which is strong simply because unassailed. As a woman of the world, she had, more than once, been brought into contact with men lax in their scrupulosity, but scrupulous in their laxity. She had had her temptations, her chances of escape; and the price to be paid was not exorbitant, in view of the relief to be obtained. But upon these she had resolutely turned her back, hoping against hope for the miracle which never came. Even now, her father's door stood wide to her, and every instinct of reason impelled her to a separation. But Vane had not only killed her love for him; he had destroyed her very taste for life itself, under any circumstances whatever. She clung to him now, not because she loved him, not because it was impossible to do without him, but because he had sapped her youth, her faith, her craving for anything short of oblivion.

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She stood for a long time, motionless, at a point where a little stream tinkled pleasantly over the stones beneath its first thin sheathing of ice. The trees, saving only the oaks, were bare, and stood stiffly, in close proximity, in the weird, white brilliance of *contre-lumière*; and for a few moments the barren tranquillity of the scene was indescribably restful. Then the light changed, as a slow cloud crept across the sun, and, with the coming of the resultant shadow, Helen, always exquisitely sensible to the moods of nature, returned suddenly to a consciousness of her extremity. It was not real, then, this negative beauty, this serene simplicity of nun-like, early winter; it was not real, her own unwonted calm! What *was* actual, material, inevitable, was the personality of the man who dominated her life like an evil spirit, using her as his chattel, abusing her as his slave. Abruptly, the whole course of their association spread itself before her, up to her last glimpse of him, that morning, shambling on his way to the miserable daily duty to which he had sunk. And this was the life which she had been so eager to share with him, the life which, in those early days, his promises had made to seem so fair! Together, they were to have seen the world—the wonderful, great world, that had shone in the distance, like a Promised Land, from the Pisgah of her girlish imaginings: London, Paris, Rome, the Nile, Greece, India, and Japan. They were to have seen them all—drunk, in company, of the wine of beauty and inspiration, doubling their individual pleasures with the magic wand of mutual comprehension, as he should turn the treasures found along their enchanted way into such words as men preserve to praise, and she stand at his side, the first to read and reverence. And now? For the first time, the full splendour of the dream, the full squalor of the reality, swept down upon her. She saw him, diverted from his own ideals, and ignorant of hers, taking the initial step upon his downward way,

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no foot of which was ever to be retraced: drunken, debauched, impotent to write one worthy word, skulking, shamefaced and sodden, through a world of sunlight and manly endeavour, like some noisome prowler of the night, surprised, far from its lair, by the dawn of sweet young day. She was no more than a girl, and already it was too late. The blitheness of life was gone, never to return. For a moment she stood with her worn hands crushed against her face, and then she stretched her arms upward to their full length, and cried aloud, "Ah, God! Ah, *God!*" to the chill, clear sky of the November day.

A voice at her side aroused her before she realized that she was not alone. At the sound she turned guiltily, and found herself face to face with a man she had never seen. He stood quite near, hat in hand, surveying her with cool, steel-blue eyes. In that first instant, with a perception sharpened by her mental anguish, she became suddenly as familiar with every detail of his appearance as if they had been intimates for years. He was tall and slender, and unmistakably young; and, in singular contrast to his pallid complexion, his lips, under the thin mustache, were full and red, with a strange, sensual crookedness that was half a smile and half a sneer. There was about him a curious, compellant air of mastery and self-possession, as of one sure of himself, and accustomed to control; and his first words, under their veneer of polite solicitude, were, in their total lack of surprise or idle curiosity, significant of the trained man of the world, while the quaint, foreign flavour of the title by which he addressed her was equally suggestive of the cosmopolite.

"You are in distress, *madame?*"

Helen paused before replying. With the instinctive delicacy of her sex, she realized that in the approach of a stranger who had surprised her in a betrayal of extreme emotion there was something which she would do well to resent; and yet she was come to one of those crises which every woman knows; when the need of sympathy, even the most casual, was imperative—when, albeit at the sacrifice of conventionality, she was fain to seek support, to grasp a firm hand, to hear a friendly, though an unknown, voice. Pride, her stanch ally through all the bitter hours of her despair, had weakened at this the most crucial point, and, like a frightened child, she would have run for reassurance into the arms of the veriest passer-by.

"Perhaps," she answered presently. "But, believe me, the expression of my feeling was purely involuntary. I thought myself alone. There are, ordinarily, few passers by this road."

He had replaced his hat now, and was no longer looking at her, but down across the shelving slope of hillside, spiked with slender trees, as close-set as the bristles of a giant brush. When he spoke again, his tone had curiously assumed the existence of a relation between them, as if, instead of total strangers, they had been old acquaintances, come together at this spot, and exchanging impressions of the scene before them.

"Strange," he said slowly, "that you should be in distress, when Nature, which always seems to me the most sympathetic of companions, is wrapped in so great repose. In my dealings with humanity, I've frequently met with misunderstanding; but never, in the attitude of Nature, a lack of what I felt to be completest comprehension of my mood. She always seems to divine our difficulties, and to have some little helpful hint, some small parable, which, if we read it aright, will point out the solution of our problem, or at least serve to soothe the momentary pang. This little stream at our feet, for example: how it preaches the lesson that while we must meet with days that are cold, unsympathetic, drear, it's not only possible, but best, to preserve, under the ice in which adversity wraps our hearts, the life and laughter which friendlier suns have taught us! I wonder if that is not the secret of all human contentment—to resign oneself to the chilling touch of the wintry days of life, secure in the knowledge that summer will return, the compensation be made manifest, and the wrong turned to right."

The rebuff which was on Helen's lips an instant before was never spoken. It was one of those moments when the intuitive assertion of dignity and self-reliance lays down its arms before the need of comfort and companionship. She did not look at him, but in her silence there was that which encouraged him to continue.

"You don't resent my speaking to you in this way?" he asked. "After all, why should you? You are a bubble on this strange, erratic stream of life, and I another. Bubble does not ask bubble the reason of their meeting, at some predestined spot between source and sea. Instead, they touch, perhaps to drift apart again after a moment; perhaps, as one often sees them, to unite in one larger, better, brighter bubble than either had been before. Neither cares a tittle for its chance companion's previous history, or for what the other bubbles say. Curiosity as to another's past is the prerogative of small-spirited man, as is also the dread of adverse criticism. Now the commingling bubbles are one of Nature's little parables, and my conception of ideal sympathy."

His eyes were upon her now, and, strangely impelled, her own came round to meet them.

"I'm not wholly sure that I get your meaning," she said, feeling that he exacted a reply. "Is it that association and sympathy are merely the result of chance?"

"Chance is only a word that we use to express the workings of a force beyond our understanding." He stooped and picked up a little stone, weighed it momentarily in his palm, and then, reversing his hand, let it fall. "One would hardly be apt to call it chance," he added, "that, after leaving my hand, that pebble reached the ground. If we understood destiny as we understand gravitation, we should not say that our present meeting was due to chance, but rather that it was the logical outcome of a natural law."

There was a long pause, during which he glanced at her more than once, with the seemingly careless but actually keenly observant air of a skilled physician studying a nervous patient. She was a little frightened, she confessed to herself, as she gathered her wits, staring at the bit of river which was visible from where they stood, and the slopes beyond. For weeks she had been

prey to an apathy which was only broken, at intervals, by an outburst of passionate revolt. Now, in some inexplicable fashion, the burden seemed to have slipped from her shoulders, and the feeling of depression was replaced by one of uplifting, of unreasonable exhilaration. The sensation was vaguely familiar to her, and, groping for a clue, she found its parallel in the preliminary action of ether, which she had taken a year or so before. Through the growing, not unpleasurable, dizziness which came upon her thus, the man's voice made its way.

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"Let me try to explain myself more clearly," he was saying. "Something—God, or chance, or destiny, or whatever you choose to call it—led me around that last turn of the road at a moment when, if I'm not mistaken, a fellow being came to the snapping-point of self-control. I can't think our meeting without significance. I believe I was sent to help you. The question is, whether you're broad and generous and courageous enough to take for granted a formal introduction, and the gradual evolution of acquaintance into intimacy, up to the moment when you would naturally turn to me, as your most loyal friend, for sympathy. And I think you will do that."

Once more Helen looked at him. Her mind was curiously clouded, but the sensation gave her no uneasiness. Instead, she felt that she was smiling.

"I think you will do it," he repeated.

He was holding out his hand with the confidence of one who knows it will be accepted, and, after a moment, she laid her own within it. His fingers closed firmly on hers, and, of a sudden, the world drew in about her, graying, as under the touch of fog. Her last perception was of his eyes fixed full on hers with an expression of quiet amusement.

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"I'm faint," she murmured, "I am—faint—"

When she came to herself, his eyes still held her.

"In the strange, unknowable book of Fate," he said, "it was written, from the beginning of time, that you and I should meet upon a dull hillside in late November, and—and that all that has been should be!"

Before she had time to answer, he had left her.

Briefly she stood, dizzy and perplexed, and then, after one great leap, her heart seemed to shudder and stand still. *She was in the sordid little living-room of the Kingsbridge cottage, and outside the day was glooming into twilight!*

Without power to move, she watched from the window the man who had just gone, pass down the path and through the gate, and, turning, wave a farewell, before he hurried away in the direction of the station. Then she was fully aroused by the entrance of the postman, and went slowly to meet him at the door. There was only one letter, but this was directed in her husband's unsteady hand, and, as she opened it, the contents leapt at her like a blow:

"HELEN:"

"Let me be as brief as you will think me brutal. When this reaches you I shall already be far at sea—with another woman. I have seen how you despised me, and I think that you know this, and that I hate you for it. I shall not ask you to forgive me, for I, too, have many things to forgive. If you had understood me, much that has happened might never have been. But what is past is past. Let us bury it and have done."

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"JOHN."

For minutes, which seemed an eternity, Helen stood, fingering the wretched sheet, and gazing straight before her with blank, unwinking eyes. Then, with a rush, came remembrance, and with it a great wave of relief. Before she fully comprehended her intention, she was at the gate of the cottage. But there she halted, with a nameless sense of loss and desperation. From the distance had come the yelp of a signalled locomotive, and then a dozen short, choking pants, as it dragged the reluctant train into motion. He had gone!

"But he will come back!" she murmured, "and, that he may come sooner, I will write."

It was only towards the end of her black, sleepless night that she remembered that she did not even know his name.

Late autumn slid gloomily into winter, and winter into spring, before she realized that he would never come. To her father she had written nothing of Vane's desertion. For a year past, his name had not been mentioned in their letters, so the omission was no longer noted, and Mr. Sterling's remittances enabled her to live in material comfort. She clung to the forlorn little cottage with a vague feeling that by it alone could she be traced when He should come back for her; but took a servant, a slovenly little wench, who moved in a circumambient odour of carbolic acid, and amassed dust under beds and sofas as a miser hoards his gold.

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Helen herself saw nothing, heeded nothing. Save in the impulse which followed her reading of Vane's letter, her mind was never wholly clear from the shadow which had descended upon it at the moment of that hand-grip on the hillside. Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, she sat at the window, motionless, listening for the creak of the gate, the crunch of footsteps on the gravel path, which would tell her that He had returned.

With spring the disillusion came, and she crept back to the shelter of her father's house, but to no change, save slow and listless surrender to the inevitable. Sometimes they heard her whispering to herself, as she sat, with some book which they had brought her, unopened on her knee—odd scraps of sentences, and broken phrases, without apparent relevancy or connection. The family physician, a friend from boyhood of Andrew Sterling, tapped his forehead significantly at such times as these, and the hands of the two men would meet in a grasp of mutual understanding.



One night in late August her child was born, and the west wind that brought a new soul to the Sterling door, pausing an instant in its passing, gathered up, and in its kind arms bore away, on its pathless flight into the Great Unknown, the tired spirit of Helen Vane. [21]

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## CHAPTER I. [22]

### MR. CARNBY RECEIVES A LETTER.

Mr. and Mrs. Jeremy Carnby furnished to the reflective observer a striking illustration of the circumstance that extremes not only meet, but, not infrequently, marry. Mrs. Carnby confessed to fifty, and was in reality forty-seven. As, in any event, incredulity answers "Never!" when a woman makes mention of her age, she preferred that the adverb should be voiced with flattering emphasis and in her presence, rather than sarcastically and behind her back. She was nothing if not original.

Mrs. Carnby was distinctly plain, a fact which five minutes of her company effectually deprived of all significance: her power of attraction being as forceful as that of a magnet, and similar to a magnet's in its absence of outward evidence. She was a woman of temperate but kaleidoscopic enthusiasms, who had retained enough of the atmosphere of each to render her interesting to a variety of persons. Prolonged experience of the world had invested her with an admirable broad-mindedness, which caused her to tread the notoriously dangerous paths of the American Colony, in which she was a constant and conspicuous figure, with the assurance of an Indian fakir walking on broken glass—pleasurably appreciative of the risk, that is, while assured by consummate *savoir faire* against cutting her feet. Her *fort* was tact. She had at one and the same time a faculty for forgetting confidences which commended her to women, and a knack of remembering them which endeared her to men. It was with the latter that she was preëminently successful. What might have been termed her masculine method was based on the broad, general principle that the adult male is most interested in the persons most interested in him, and it never failed, in its many modifications, of effect. Men told her of their love-affairs, for example, with the same unquestioning assurance wherewith they intrusted their funds to a reputable banker; and were apt to remember the manner in which their confidences were received, longer than the details of the confidences themselves. And when you can listen for an hour, with every evidence of extreme interest, to a man's rhapsodies about another woman, and, at the end, send him away with a distinct recollection of the gown you wore, or the perfume on the handkerchief he picked up for you, then, dear lady, there is nothing more to be said. [23]

Mr. Jeremy Carnby infrequently accompanied his wife to a reception or a *musicale*, somewhat as Chinese idols and emperors are occasionally produced in public—as an assurance of good faith, that is, and in proof of actual existence. As it is not good form to flaunt one's marriage certificate in the faces of society, an undeniable, flesh-and-blood husband is, perhaps, the next best thing—when exhibited, of course, with that golden mean of frequency which lies between a hint of henpeck on the one side and a suggestion of neglect upon the other. Mrs. Carnby blazed in the social firmament of the American Colony with the unwavering fixity of the Polar Star: Jeremy appeared rarely, but with extreme regularity, like a comet of wide orbit, as evidence that the marital solar system was working smoothly and well. [24]

Mrs. Carnby was, and not unreasonably, proud of Jeremy. They had lived twenty-five years in Paris, and, to the best of her knowledge and belief, he was as yet unaware, at least in a sentimental sense, that other women so much as existed. Since one cannot own the Obélisque or the Vénus de Milo, it is assuredly something to have a husband who never turns his head on the Avenue du Bois, or finds a use for an opera-glass at the Folies-Bergère. Jeremy was not amusing, still less brilliant, least of all popular; but he was preëminently loyal and unfeignedly affectionate—qualities sufficiently rare in the world in which Mrs. Carnby lived, and moved, and had the greater portion of her being, to recommend themselves strongly to her shrewd, uncompromising mind. In her somewhat over-furnished life he occupied a distinct niche, which one else could have filled; and in this, to her way of thinking, he was unique—as a husband. After *foie gras* and champagne, Mrs. Carnby always breakfasted on American hominy, a mealy red apple, and a glass of milk. She was equally careful, however, to take the meal in company with Jeremy. He was part of the treatment. [25]

The Carnby *hôtel* was one of the number in the Villa Dupont. One turned in through a narrow gateway, from the sordid dinginess of the Rue Pergolèse, and, at a stone's throw from the latter's pungent cheese and butter shops, and grimy *charbonneries*, came delightfully into the shade of chestnuts greener than those exposed to the dust of the great avenues, and to the sound of fountains plashing into basins buried in fresh turf. It was very quiet, like some charming little back street at St. Germain or Versailles, and the houses, with their white walls and green shutters and glass-enclosed porticos, were more like country villas than Parisian *hôtels*. The gay stir of the boulevards and the Avenue du Bois might, to all seeming, have been a hundred kilometres distant, so still and simple was this little corner of the capital. Jeremy frankly adored it. He had a great office looking out upon the Place de l'Opéra, and when he rose from his desk, his head aching with the reports and accounts of the mighty insurance company of which he was the European manager, and went to the window in search of distraction, it was only to have his eyes met by a dizzier hodge-podge than that of the figures he had left—the moil of *camions*, omnibuses, and cabs, threading in and out at the intersection of the six wide driveways, first up [26]

and down, and then across, as the brigadier in charge regulated the traffic with sharp trills of his whistle, which jerked up the right arms of the policemen at the crossings, as if some one had pulled the strings of so many marionettes with white batons in their hands. All this was not irritating, or even displeasing, to Jeremy. He was too thorough an American, despite his long residence in Paris, and too keen a business man, notwithstanding his wife's fortune, not to derive satisfaction from every evidence of human energy. The Place de l'Opéra appealed to the same instincts in his temperament that would have been gratified by the sight of a stop-cylinder printing-machine in action. But, not the less for that, his heart was domiciled in the *hôtel* in the Villa Dupont.

On a certain evening in mid-April, Jeremy had elaborated his customary half-hour walk homeward with a detour by way of the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Parc Monceau, and the Avenue Hoche, and it was close upon six when he let himself in at his front door, and laid his derby among the shining top-hats of his wife's callers, on the table in the *antichambre*. Through the half-parted curtains at the *salon* door came scraps of conversation, both in French and English, and the pleasant tinkle of cups and saucers; and, as he passed, he had a glimpse of several well-groomed men, in white waistcoats and gaiters, sitting on the extreme edges of their chairs, with their toes turned in, their elbows on their knees, and tea-cups in their hands; and smartly-dressed women, with big hats, and their veils tucked up across their noses, nibbling at *petits fours*. He turned into his study with a feeling of satisfaction. It was incomprehensible to his mind, this seemingly universal passion for tea and sweet cakes; but if the institution was to exist under his roof at all, it was gratifying to know that, albeit the tea was the finest Indian overland, and the sweet cakes from the Maison Gagé, it was not for these reasons alone that the 16th Arrondissement was eager, and the 7th not loath, to be received at the *hôtel* in the Villa Dupont. Jeremy knew that his wife was the most popular woman in the Colony, as to him she was the best and most beautiful in the world. Before he touched the *Temps* or the half-dozen letters which lay upon his table, he leaned forward, with his elbows on the silver-mounted blotter, and his temples in his hands, and looked long at her photograph smiling at him out of its Russian enamel frame. If the world, which laughed at him for his prim black neckties and his common-sense shoes, even while it respected him for his business ability, had seen him thus, it would have shared his wife's knowledge that Jeremy Carnby was an uncommonly good sort.

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He opened his letters carefully, slitting the envelopes with a slender paper-knife, and endorsing each one methodically with the date of receipt before passing on to the next. All were private and personal, his voluminous business mail being handled at his office by a secretary and two stenographers. With characteristic loyalty, Jeremy wrote regularly to a score of old acquaintances and poor relations in the States, most of whom he had seen but once or twice in the twenty-five years of his exile, and read their replies with interest, often with emotion: and his own left hand knew not how many cheques had been signed, and cheering words written, by his unassuming right, in reply to the complaints and appeals of his intimates of former years. For the steady, white light of Jeremy Carnby's kindness let never a glint of its brightness pass through the closely-woven bushel of his modesty.

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He hesitated with the last letter in his hand, reread it slowly, and then lit a cigar and sat looking fixedly at his inkstand, blowing out thin coils of smoke. So Mrs. Carnby found him, as she swept in, dropped into a big red-leather arm-chair, and slid smoothly into an especial variety of small talk, wherewith she was wont to smooth the business wrinkles from his forehead, and bring him into a frame of mind proper to an appreciation of the efforts of their *chef*.

"If it isn't smoking a cigar at fifteen minutes before the dinner-hour!" she began, with an assumption of indignation. "Really, Jeremy, you're getting quite revolutionary in your ways. I think I shall tell Armand that hereafter we shall begin dinner with coffee, have salad with the Rüdeshheimer, and take our soup in the conservatory."

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Mr. Carnby laid down his cigar.

"I lit it absent-mindedly," he answered. "Have they gone?"

"No, of course not, stupid!" retorted his wife. "They're all out there. I told them to wait until we'd finished dinner. Now, Jeremy! why *will* you ask such questions?"

"It *was* stupid of me," he admitted.

"And to punish you, I shall tell you who they were," announced Mrs. Carnby. "I might do worse and tell you all they said. You're so—so *comfortable*, Jeremy. When I'm on the point of boiling over because of the inanities of society I can always come in here and open my safety-valve, and you don't care a particle, do you, if I fill your study full of conversational steam?"

Jeremy smiled pleasantly.

"You *nice* person!" added his wife. "Well, here goes. First, there was that stupid Mrs. Maitland. She told me all about her portrait. It seems Benjamin-Constant is painting it—and I thought the others would never come. Finally, however, they did—the Villemot girls and Mrs. Sidney Kane, and a few men—Daulas and De Bousac and Gerald Kennedy and that insufferable little Lister man. Then Madame Palffy. It makes me furious every time I hear her called 'madame.' The creature was born in Worcester—and do you know, Jeremy, I'm positive she buys her gowns at an upholsterer's? No mere dressmaker could lend her that striking resemblance to a sofa, which is growing stronger every day! Her French is too impossible. She was telling Daulas about something that never happened to her on her way out to their country place, and I heard her say '*compartiment de dames soûles*' quite distinctly. I can't imagine how she contrives to know so many things that aren't so. One would suppose she'd stumble over a real, live fact now and again, if only by accident. And her husband's no better. Trying to find the truth in one of his stories severely taxes one's aptitude in long division. I saw him at the Hatzfeldts' *musicale* night before

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last. Pazzini was playing, and Palffy was sound asleep in a corner, after three glasses of punch. I really felt sorry that a man with such a wife should be missing something attractive, and I was going to poke him surreptitiously with my fan, but Tom Radwalader said, 'Better let the lying dog sleep!' He positively *is* amusing, that Radwalader man!"

Mrs. Carnby looked up at her husband for the admiring smile which was the usual guarantee that she had amused him, but only to find Jeremy's eyes once more riveted upon the inkstand, and the cigar between his thin lips again.

"My dear Jeremy," she said, "I'm convinced that you've not heard one syllable of my carefully prepared discourse." [31]

"My dear Louisa," responded Mr. Carnby with unwonted readiness, "I'm convinced that I have not. The truth of the matter is," he added apologetically, "that I've received an unusual letter."

"It must indeed be unusual if it can cause you to ignore my conversation," said Louisa Carnby.

"That is perfectly true," said Jeremy with conviction.

His wife rose, came over to his side, and kissed him on the tip of his nose.

"Good my lord," she said, "I think I like your tranquil endorsement of the compliments I make for myself better than those which other men invent out of their own silly heads! Am I to know what is in your unusual letter?"

"Why not?" asked Jeremy seriously.

"Why not, indeed?" said Mrs. Carnby. "I have taken you for better or worse. There's so little 'worse' about the contract, Jeremy, that I stand ready to accept such as there is in a willing spirit, even when it comes in the form of a dull letter."

Jeremy looked up at her with his familiar smile.

"Louisa," he said, "if I were twenty years of age, I should ask nothing better than the chance to marry you again."

"Man! but thou'rt the cozener!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnby. "Thou'dst fair turn the head of a puir lassie. There—that'll do. Go on with your letter!" [32]

"It's from Andrew Sterling," said Jeremy. "You'll remember him, I think, in Boston. He was a friend of my father's, and kept a friendly eye on me after the old gentleman's death. We've always corresponded, more or less regularly, and now he writes to say—but perhaps I'd best read you that part of his letter."

"Undoubtedly," put in his wife. "That is, if you can. People write so badly, nowadays."

"Um—um—" mumbled Jeremy, skipping the introductory sentences. "Ah! Here we have it. Mr. Sterling says: 'Now for the main purpose of this letter. My poor daughter's only son, Andrew Sterling Vane, is sailing to-day on the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*. He has been obliged to leave Harvard, as his health is not robust, and I have thought that perhaps the sea-voyage and some months in Paris might put him in shape—'"

"Good Lord!" broke in Mrs. Carnby. "Imagine some months in Paris by way of rest-cure!"

"And so," continued Jeremy, "I'm sending him over, in hopes that the change may be of benefit. He is a singular lad—sensitive in the extreme, and utterly inexperienced—and I am going to ask if, "for auld lang syne," you will be so good as to make him welcome. I don't mean, of course, that I expect you to exercise any sort of supervision. The boy must take care of himself, like all of us, but I would like to feel that, in a strange city, there is one place where he may find a hint of home." [33]

Jeremy paused.

"Go on!" observed Mrs. Carnby.

"There is really nothing more of importance," said her husband, "except that I've also received a note from young Vane. He's at the Ritz."

"Of course!" ejaculated Mrs. Carnby. "Paying two louis per diem for his room, and making semi-daily trips to Morgan, Harjes'. They're wonderful, these tourist bank-accounts. Their progress from a respectable amount to absolute zero is as inevitable as the recession of the sea from high-water mark to dead low tide—a steady withdrawal from the bank, my dear Jeremy! How old might the young gentlemen be?"

Mr. Carnby made a mental calculation.

"His mother was about my own age," he said presently. "I know she and I used to go to dancing-school together. And she died in childbirth, if I remember rightly. Her husband was a scamp—ran off with another woman. I never saw him. That would make the boy about twenty or twenty-one."

"He will be rather good-looking," said Mrs. Carnby reflectively, "with a general suggestion of soap and cold water about him. He will wear preposterously heavy boots with the soles projecting all around like little piazzas, and a straw hat, and dog-skin gloves with seams like small hedges, and turned back at the wrists. They're all exactly alike, the young Americans one sees over here. One would think they came by the dozen, in a box. And when he is sitting down he will be hitching at his trousers all the time, so that the only thing one remembers about him afterwards is the pattern of his stockings." [34]

"We ought to invite him to dinner," suggested Jeremy.

"Without doubt," agreed his wife; "but to breakfast first, I think—and on Sunday. One can judge a man's character so well by the way he behaves at Sunday breakfast. If he fidgets, and drinks quantities of water, then he's dissipated! I don't know why Saturday night is always fatal to dissipated men, but it is. If his top hat looks as if it had been brushed the wrong way, then he's

religious, and has been to church. I shall go out and inspect it while you're smoking. If he does all the talking, he's an ass; and if I do it all, he's a fool."

"You're a difficult critic, my dear," said Jeremy. "You must remember he is only twenty or so."

"To be twenty or so in appearance is a man's misfortune," replied Mrs. Carnby. "To be twenty or so in behaviour is his fault. I'll write to him to-night, and ask him to breakfast on Sunday, *tout à fait en famille*, and we'll try him on a—you don't mind my calling you a dog, Jeremy?"

"Not in the least," said Mr. Carnby.

"*Eh bien!*" said his wife. "We'll have him to breakfast on Sunday, and try him on a dog! If he's presentable and amusing, I shall make him my exclusive property. If he's dull, I shall tell him Madame Palffy is a woman he should cultivate assiduously. I send her all the people who don't pass muster at my dinners. She has them next day, like warmed-over *vol-au-vents*. My funeral baked meats do coldly furnish forth her breakfast-table."

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"When you wish to appear most unmerciful, my dear," said Jeremy, "you always pick out Madame Palffy; and whenever you do, I spoil the effect of what you say by thinking of—"

"Margery?" put in Mrs. Carnby. "Yes, of course, that's my soft spot, Jeremy. There's only one thing which Margery Palffy ought to be that she isn't, and that's—ahem!—an orphan."

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## CHAPTER II.

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### NEW FRIENDS AND OLD.

In ordinary, Mrs. Carnby was one of the rare mortals who succeed in disposing as well as in proposing, but there were times when there was not even a family resemblance between her plans and her performances. She had fully intended that young Vane should be the only guest at her Sunday breakfast, but as she came out of church that morning into the brilliant sunlight of the Avenue de l'Alma, she found herself face to face with the Ratchetts, newly returned from Monte Carlo, and promptly bundled the pair of them into her victoria. Furthermore, as the carriage swung round the Arc, and into the Avenue du Bois, she suddenly espied Mr. Thomas Radwalader, lounging, with an air of infinite boredom, down the *plage*.

"There's that Radwalader, thinking about himself again!" she exclaimed, digging her coachman in the small of his ample back with the point of her tulle parasol. "Positively, it would be cruelty to animals not to rescue him. *Arretez, Benoit!*"

Radwalader came up languidly as the carriage stopped.

"Where are you going?" demanded Mrs. Carnby, after greetings had been exchanged.

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"Home," answered Radwalader. "I met Madame Palffy back there a bit, and couldn't get away for ten minutes. You know, it's shocking on the nerves, that kind of thing, so I thought I'd drop in at my quarters for a pick-me-up."

"Well, if I'm not a pick-you-up, I'm sure I don't know what is," said Mrs. Carnby. "You're to come to breakfast. You'll have to walk, though. We're three already, you see, and I don't want people to take my carriage for a *panier à salade*. I hadn't the most remote intention of asking you; but when a man tells me he's been talking for ten minutes to that Palffy, I always take him in and give him a good square meal."

"You're very kind," said Radwalader. "Are you going to play bridge afterwards? If so, I must go home for more money."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Mrs. Carnby emphatically. "There's a *protégé* of Jeremy's coming to breakfast—a Bostonian, twenty years young, and over here for his health. You must all go, directly after coffee. I'm going to spend the afternoon feeding him with sweet spirits of nitre out of a spoon, and teaching him his catechism. Perhaps you'd like to stay and learn yours?"

"I think I know it," laughed Radwalader.

"If you do, it's one of your own fabrication, then—with just a single question and answer. 'What is my duty toward myself? My duty toward myself is, under all circumstances, to do exactly as I dee please.'"

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"If that were the case, my good woman, I should live up to my profession of faith, not only by accepting your invitation, as I mean to do, but by staying the entire afternoon."

"That's very nicely said indeed," answered Mrs. Carnby. "*Allez, Benoit!*"

Twenty minutes later the whole party were assembled in her *salon*. Carnby, caught by his wife as he was scuttling into his study, was now doing his visibly inadequate best to entertain Philip Ratchett, who stood gloomily before him, with his legs far apart, his hands in his pockets, and his eyes on the top button of his host's waistcoat. He was a typical Englishman, of the variety which leans against door-jambs in the pages of *Punch*, and makes unfortunate remarks beginning with "I say—" about the relatives of the stranger addressed. Society bored him to the verge of extinction, but it is only fair to say that he repaid the debt with interest. He was tolerated—as many a man before and after him has been—for the sake of his wife.

Mrs. Ratchett patronized, with equal ardour, a sewing-class which fabricated unmentionable garments of red flannel for supposedly grateful heathen, and a society for psychical research which boasted of liberal-mindedness because it was willing to admit that, at the dawn of the twentieth century, the causes of certain natural phenomena yet remained unexplained. Her

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entire conception of life underwent a radical change whenever she read a new book, which she did at fortnightly intervals. She was thirty, clever, and frankly beautiful, hence a factor in the Colony.

The fifth member of the company in Mrs. Carnby's *salon*, Mr. Thomas Radwalader, enjoyed the truly Parisian distinction of being an impecunious bachelor who did not accept all the invitations he received. He might have been thirty-five or forty-five or fifty-five. His smooth-shaven, impassive face offered no indication whatever of his age. He was already quite gray, but, in contrast to this, his speech was tinged with a frivolity, rather pleasant than otherwise, which hinted at youth. Mrs. Carnby had once described him as being "dappled with knowledge," and this, in common with the majority of Mrs. Carnby's estimates, came admirably near to being exact. Radwalader's actual fund of information was far less ample than was indicated by the facility with which he talked on any and every subject, but he was master of the science of selection. He judged others—and rightly—by himself, and went upon the often-proven theory that a polished brilliant attracts more attention than an uncut Koh-i-nur. He made the superficial things of life his own, and on the rare occasions when the trend of conversation led him out of his depth, he caught at the life-belt of epigram, and had found his feet again before men better informed had finished floundering. He lived in a tiny apartment, on the safe side of nothing a year, and kept up appearances with a skill that was little short of genius. Gossip passed him by, a circumstance for which he was devoutly grateful, though it was due less to chance than to management.

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Such was the company into which Mr. Andrew Sterling had despatched his grandson—in hopes that the change might be of benefit. As he came through the *portières*, young Vane proved to tally, in the main essentials of appearance, with Mrs. Carnby's prophetic estimate. He was somewhat more than rather good-looking, and essentially American, with the soap-and-cold-water suggestion strongly to the fore. Mrs. Carnby always noted three things about a man before she spoke to him—his hands, his linen, and his eyes. In the first two Andrew Vane qualified immediately; in the third his hostess was forced to confess herself at a loss. In singular contrast to a complexion dark almost to swartheness, his eyes were large and of an intense steel-blue. He met those of another squarely, not alone with the frankness characteristic of youth, but with the strange calm of confidence typical of men accustomed to the command of a battle-ship or an army corps. Mrs. Carnby, in ordinary the most self-possessed of women, gave, almost guiltily, before the keen, clear eyes of Andrew Vane.

"He has no business whatever to have eyes like that, at his age," she told herself, almost angrily. "They ought to *grow* in a man's head, after he has seen everything there is to be seen."

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The thought was involuntary, but it recalled to her memory where she had seen their like before.

"Radwalader has them," she added mentally. "*Good Lord! Radwalader!* And this child hasn't even graduated!"

During the brief interval between the general introduction and the announcement of breakfast, she studied her new guest with unwonted interest. He was of the satisfactory medium height at which a man is neither contemptible nor clumsy, slight in build, but straight as an arrow, with narrow hips and a square backward fling of shoulder which spoke of resolution.

"He has 'No Compromise' written all over his back," said Mrs. Carnby to herself. "I should believe everything he told me, and not be afraid of what I told him."

Then she noted that he was eminently at ease. There is something out of the common about twenty that keeps its hands hanging at its sides, and its feet firmly planted, without suggesting a tailor's dummy. Andrew was talking to Mr. Carnby about his grandfather and Boston, and from the first to the last word of the short colloquy he did not once shift his position. As he stood thus, in some curious fashion consideration of his years was completely eliminated from one's thought of him. He was deferential, but in the negative manner of guest to host, rather than in the positive of youth to age; and, at the same time, he was assertive, but with the force of personality, not the conspicuity of awkwardness. He fitted into his surroundings instantly, like a wisely placed *bibelot*, but he dominated them as well.

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"That Palfy," was Mrs. Carnby's final resolve, "shall get him only over my dead body."

And so, unconsciously, Andrew scored his first Parisian triumph.

For the first ten minutes of breakfast, Mrs. Carnby, at whose left he sat, let him designedly alone. It was her belief that men, like saddle-horses, should be given their heads in strange territory, and left to find themselves—this in contrast to the policy of her social rival, Madame Palfy, who boasted of being able to draw out the best there was in a new acquaintance in the first quarter-hour of conversation. In this she was probably correct, though in a sense which she did not perceive—for few good qualities survived the strain of that initial quarter-hour.

But if Mrs. Carnby's attention appeared to be engrossed by Radwalader on her right, and Mrs. Ratchett beyond Radwalader, she kept, nevertheless, a weather eye on Andrew; and when, presently, his spoon tinkled on his *bouillon* saucer, she turned to him.

"I've been watching you," she began, "to see how you would take to French oysters. It's a test I always apply to newcomers from America. If they eat only one *Marennnes verte*, I know at once that they approve of forty-story buildings, and are going to talk about 'getting back to God's country'; if they eat all six, I know I may venture to hint that there are advantages about living in Paris, without having my head bitten off for being an expatriate."

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"It would seem your head is quite safe, so far as I am concerned," laughed Andrew, "for I finished off my half-dozen, and thought them very good."

"Then you have the soul of a Parisian in the body of a Bostonian," affirmed Mrs. Carnby. "A liking for *Marennés vertes* is a survival of a previous state of existence. Here's Mr. Radwalader, for instance, who can't abide them, even after Heaven knows *how* many years in Paris."

"They taste so much like two-sou pieces that, whenever I eat them, they make me feel like a frog savings-bank," said Radwalader.

"There you are!" cried Mrs. Carnby triumphantly. "That would never have arisen as an objection in the mind of any one who had known what it is to be a Parisian."

"Or a frog savings-bank," said Radwalader. "No, I suppose not. I can't seem to live down the fact that I was born in the shadow of Independence Hall. But I'm doing so much to make up for the bad beginnings of my present incarnation, that I shall undoubtedly be a Parisian in my next. Have you been here long, Mr. Vane?"

"Three days."

"Do you speak French?" put in Mrs. Carnby. "No? What a pity! You've no idea what a difference it makes."

"I've only such a smattering as one gets in school and college," said Andrew. "Of course I didn't *know* I was coming over here. But, after all, one seems to get on very well with English."

"That's just the trouble, Mr. Vane," volunteered Mrs. Ratchett. "So many Americans are content just to 'get on' over here. That isn't the cue to Paris at all! It only means that you and she are on terms of bowing acquaintance. You'll never get to know her till you can talk to her in her own tongue."

"Or listen to her talk to you," observed Radwalader. "So long as we're using the feminine gender—"

"Oh!" interrupted Mrs. Carnby. "A remark like that *does* come with *extreme* grace from you, I *must* say. Here," she added, turning to Mrs. Ratchett, and indicating Radwalader with her fish-fork, "here's a man, my dear, who spent two solid hours of last Monday telling me the story of his life. And it reminded me precisely of a peacock—one long, stuck-up tale with a hundred I's in it. Radwalader, you're a brute!"

Carnby, with his eyes fixed vacantly upon a spot midway between a pepper-mill and a little dish of salted almonds, appeared to be revolving some complicated business problem in his mind; and, as his wife caught sight of him, her fish-fork swung round a quarter-circle in her fingers, like a silver weathercock, until, instead of Radwalader, it indicated the point of her husband's nose.

"That person," she said to Andrew, "is either in Trieste or Buda. His company has an incapable agent in both cities, and whenever he glares at vacancy, like a hairdresser's image, I know he is in either one town or the other. With practice, I shall come to detect the shade of difference in his expression which will tell me which it is. Mr. Ratchett—some more of the *éperlans*?"

Ratchett was deeply engaged in dressing morsels of smelts in little overcoats of *sauce tartare*, assisting them carefully with his knife to scramble aboard his fork, and, having braced them there firmly with cubes of creamed potato, conveying the whole arrangement to his mouth, where he instantly secured it from escape by popping in a piece of bread upon its very heels. He looked up, as Mrs. Carnby spoke to him, murmured "k you," and immediately returned to the business in hand. Radwalader and Mrs. Ratchett had fallen foul of each other over a chance remark of his, and were now just disappearing into a fog of art discussion, from which, in his voice, an abrupt "Besnard" popped, at intervals, as indignantly as a ball from a Roman candle, or, in hers, the word "Whistler" rolled forth with an inflection which suggested the name of a cathedral.

"Tell me a little about yourself," said Mrs. Carnby, turning again to Andrew.

"If it's to be about myself," he answered, "I think it's apt to be little indeed. I've been in college almost three years, but I've been kept back, more or less, by a touch of fever I picked up on a trip to Cuba. It crops out every now and again, and knocks me into good-for-nothingness for a while. I'm not sure that I shall go back to Harvard. You see, I want to *do* something."

"What?" demanded Mrs. Carnby.

"I'm not sure. I'm over here in search of a hint."

"And a very excellent idea, too!" said his hostess. "Because, if you will keep your eyes open in the American Colony, you'll see about everything which a man ought *not* to do; and after that it should be comparatively easy to make a choice among the few things that remain."

"You're not very flattering to the American Colony," said Andrew.

"That's because I belong to it," replied Mrs. Carnby, "and you'll find I'm about the only woman in it, able to speak French, who will make that admission. I belong to it, and I love it—for its name. It's about as much like America as a cold veal cutlet with its gravy coagulated—if you've ever seen *that!*—is like the same thing fresh off the grill. But I don't allow any one but myself to say so!"

"You're patriotic," suggested Andrew.

"Only passively. I'm extremely doubtful as to the exact location of 'God's country,' and, even if you were to prove to my satisfaction that it lies between Seattle and Tampa, I'm not sure I should want to live there. America's a kind of conservatory on my estate. I don't care to sit in it continually, but, at the same time, I don't like to have other people throwing stones through the roof. But about what you want to do?"

"I really haven't the most remote idea. I want it to be something worth while—something which will attract attention."

"Nothing does, nowadays," said Mrs. Carnby, "except air-ships and remarriage within two hours of divorce."

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"What *are* you talking about?" asked Mrs. Ratchett, suddenly abandoning the argument in which it was evident that she was coming out second best.

"My choice of a profession," replied Andrew. "I don't want to make a mistake. But everything seems to be overcrowded."

"Exactly," observed Radwalader. "It isn't so much a question of selecting what's right as of getting what's left. Haven't you a special talent?"

"I'm afraid not," said Andrew.

"And if you had, it wouldn't do you much good in the States," commented Mrs. Carnby. "Nothing counts over there but money and social position. It's the only country on earth where it's less blessed to be gifted than received."

"I had thought of civil engineering," said Andrew.

"Civil engineering?" repeated Mrs. Carnby. "But, my dear Mr. Vane, *that's* not a profession. It's only a synonym for getting on in society. We're all of us civil engineers!"

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She pushed back her chair as she spoke.

"We'll wait for you in the *salon*," she added, "and, meanwhile, Mrs. Ratchett and I will think up a profession for Mr. Vane. Jeremy, you're to give them the shortest cigars you have."

"I was once in the same quandary," said Radwalader to Andrew, when the men were left alone, "and concluded to let Time answer the question for me. You may have noticed that Time is prone to reticence. So far, he has not committed himself one way or another."

"I'm afraid I haven't the patience for that," said Andrew. "Besides, it's different in America. One *has* to do something over there. It's almost against the law to be idle."

"Of course. The only remedy for that is to live in Paris. You might do that. It's a profession all by itself—of faith, if nothing else. Only one has need of the golden means."

"I think I am a homeopathist, so far as Europe is concerned," said Andrew. "I'm already a little homesick for the Common."

"It's a bad pun," answered Radwalader, "but is there anything in America but—the common?"

"You can't expect me to agree with you there."

"I don't. I never expect any one to agree with me. It takes all the charm out of conversation. You may remember that Mark Twain once said that it's a difference of opinion which makes horse-races. He should have made it human races. That would have been truer, and so, more original. But a homeopathist is only a man who has never tried allopathy. You must let me convert you by showing you something of Paris. If I've any profession at all, it's that of guide."

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"You're very kind," said Andrew, "but you mustn't let your courtesy put you to inconvenience on my account. There must be a penalty attached to knowing Paris well, in the form of fellow country-men who want to be shown about."

"'Never a rose but has its thorn,'" quoted Radwalader. "If you know Paris well, you're overrun; and if you don't, you're run over. Of the two, the former is the less objectionable. When we leave here, perhaps you'd like to go out to the races for a while? If you haven't been, Auteuil is well worth seeing of a Sunday afternoon."

"I should be very glad," said Andrew.

"Then we'll consider it agreed. I see Carnby is getting to his feet. He is about to make his regular postprandial speech. It is one to be commended for its brevity."

"The ladies?" suggested Jeremy interrogatively.

"By all means!" said Radwalader, as his cigarette sizzled into the remainder of his coffee. "It's a toast to which we all respond."

"By the way," said Ratchett, as they moved toward the *portières*, "I was going to ask you chaps about membership in the Volney."

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The three men gathered in a group, and Andrew, seeing that they were about to speak of something in which he had no concern, passed into the *salon*. Here he was surprised to find three women instead of two—still more surprised when the newcomer wheeled suddenly, and came toward him with both hands outstretched.

"How do you *do*?" she said. "What a charming surprise! Mrs. Carnby was just speaking of you, and I've been telling her what jolly times we used to have last summer at Beverly. How delightful to find you here! Mrs. Carnby's my dearest friend, you must know, Mr. Vane."

"Miss Palfy is one of the few people to whom I always feel equal," observed Mrs. Carnby.

"I can say the same, I'm sure," agreed Andrew.

"That means that you and I are to be friends as well, then," answered Mrs. Carnby, "because things that are equal to the same thing are bound to be equal to each other. Are you going out with Jeremy, Margery?"

"Yes—our usual Sunday spree, you know. He's a dear!"

She bent over as she spoke and buried her nose in one of the big roses on the table.

"Lord, girl, but I'm glad to see you again!" said the inner voice of Andrew Vane.

The saddling-bell was whirring for the third race as Andrew and Radwalader slipped in at the main entrance of Auteuil, and made their way rapidly through the throng behind the *tribunes*, in the direction of the betting-booths beyond.

"We'll just have time to place our bets," said Radwalader, as he scanned the bulletins. "Numbers two, five, six, and eleven are out. Scratch them off your programme and we'll take our pick of the rest."

"You'll have to advise me," answered Andrew. "One couldn't very well be more ignorant of the horses than I am."

"I never give advice," said Radwalader, with an air of seriousness. "I used to, long ago. I went about vaccinating my friends, as it were, with counsel, but none of it ever took, or was taken—whichever way you choose to put it—so I gave it up. Besides, a French race-horse is like the girl one elects to marry. The choice is purely a matter of luck, and there's no depending upon the record of previous performances. I've always thought that if I had to choose a wife, I'd prefer to do it in the course of a game of blind-man's buff. The one I caught I'd keep. Then the choice would at least be unprejudiced. Shut your eyes, my dear Vane, and stick your pencil-point through your programme. Then open them and bet on the horse nearest the puncture." And he went through this little performance himself with the utmost solemnity. "It's Vivandière," he added. "I shall stake a louis on Vivandière."

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"And I, for originality's sake, shall choose Mathias, with my eyes open," said Andrew, laughing, as they took their places in line before the booth.

"Well, you couldn't do better," observed his companion. "He's a willing little beast, and not unlikely to romp home in the lead. I'd bet on him myself, except that I'm so damnably unlucky that it really wouldn't be fair to you, Vane. I never back a horse but what he falls. I had ten louis up, last Sunday, on a steeplechase, and the water-jump was so full of the horses I'd chosen that, upon my soul, you couldn't see the water! It was for all the world like the sunken road at Waterloo after the charge of the *cuirassiers*."

When they had purchased their tickets, Radwalader led the way to the front of the *tribunes*, and, mounting upon the bench along the rail, turned his back upon the course, and began to survey the throng in the tiers of seats above.

"This is my favourite way of introducing a newcomer to Paris," he said presently. "She never appears to better advantage than when she is togged out in her Sunday-go-to-race-meeting-best."

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With his stick he began to point out people here and there, until, from a narrow gateway to their right, the horses filed out upon the track, and they turned, resting their elbows on the railing, to watch them go by.

"That's Vivandière," said Radwalader. "Poor animal! She runs the best possible chance of breaking her neck. If the jockey so much as suspected that I'd her number in my pocket, he'd probably have taken out a policy on his life. There's Mathias—the little chestnut. He looks in rattling good form. I suspect you haven't thrown away that louis."

"It wouldn't be a very ruinous loss, in any event," said Andrew.

Radwalader was choosing a cigarette from his case.

"I wonder," he answered, rolling it between his fingers, "if you'd mind my asking you if you mean that? To some people it would be a consideration; to others, none whatever. It isn't conventional, or even good form, to pry into a man's finances, but we shall probably be going about together, more or less, during your stay, and in such a case I always like to know how a man stands in regard to expenses. I don't want to embarrass you by proposing things you don't feel you can afford, still less to be a clog upon you when you wish to go beyond my means."

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He looked up, smiling frankly.

"Don't misunderstand me," he added. "It's not in the least an idle curiosity. I'm an old friend of Mrs. Carnby's, and it would be a great pleasure to do anything to make your visit a success. But, if you'll trust me, I'd be glad to know how you propose to live. You don't think me impertinent?"

"Not in the least," said Andrew. "I understand perfectly. It's a very sensible point of view. And I'll say candidly that my grandfather, Mr. Sterling, has been very generous; so that, unless I'm totally reckless, there's no reason why I shouldn't have the best of everything." He paused for a moment, and then added: "My letter of credit is for thirty thousand francs."

"Thank you," said Radwalader. "It makes things easier. I'd forgotten for the moment your relationship to Mr. Sterling, or I shouldn't have needed to take the liberty of speaking as I did. I met him once in Boston, I think. Isn't he called the 'Copper Czar'?"

"I believe he is," replied Andrew. "But there's not much in nicknames, you know."

"No, of course not," agreed his companion. "There goes the bell. For once, it's a fair start."

Far away, beyond the thickly-peopled stretch of the *pelouse*, a group of gaily-coloured dots went rocking rapidly to the left, vanished for an instant at the turn, and then flashed into view again in the form of jockeys standing stiffly in their stirrups, as the horses swept down the transverse stretch. People were shouting all about them, and in Andrew's unaccustomed ears the blood surged and hammered madly. He was at the age when there is nothing more inspiring than such a play of life and action, under the open sky and over the close-cropped turf. The ripple of lithe muscles along the sleek flanks of the horses; the set, smooth-shaven faces of the rigid jockeys; the gleam of sunlight and colour; and the deep, crescendo voice of the multitude, swelling to thunder as the racers flew past—all these set his pulses tingling, until he, too, cried

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out impulsively in his excitement. It was his first horse-race, and his first glimpse of Paris into the bargain. There is more than enough in the combination to set young blood aglow.

"*Houp! Houp! Houp!*" With sharp, staccato cries of encouragement, the jockeys were raising their mounts at the water-jump, over which they sailed gallantly, one after another, like great brown birds, until the very last. There was a lisp of grazed twigs, a long "A-ah!" from *pelouse* and *pesage* alike, a dull splash which sent the spray flying high in silver beads and then a jockey in a crimson blouse rolled heavily forward on the turf, arose, stamped his foot, and swore profusely in picturesque cockney at his mare, who had regained her feet and, with dangling rein and saddle all askew, stood looking back at him, as if uncertain whether to stop and inquire after his injuries or go on alone. Abruptly deciding upon the latter as the wiser course, she set off at a leisurely gallop, to the accompaniment of shrill, sarcastic comments from the crowd, and an additional exposition of the jockey's astonishing wealth of vocabulary.

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"*Voilà!*" sighed Radwalader. "That was Vivandière! What did I tell you? It's absolutely inhuman of me to bet on a horse. And look at Mathias! He's twenty metres ahead of the rest, and going better every minute. You've hit it this time, Vane. There's one comfort. You'll win back my louis, at all events. It's something to know that the money's not going out of the family."

The crowd was already shouting "*Mathias! C'est Mathias qui gagne!*" as Andrew bent forward to see the horses wheel again into the transverse cut. Mathias was far in the lead, and seemed to gain yet more at the hurdle. The race was practically over, a thousand yards from the finish, and, as Mathias flashed past the post, a winner by twenty lengths, and Vivandière came ambling complacently in, at the end of the procession, with the stirrups bouncing grotesquely up and down, Radwalader replaced his field-glass with a deep sigh of resignation, and the two men went back toward the bulletins to see the posting of the payments.

It appeared, when the figures snapped into place, that Mathias returned one hundred and ten francs, which meant a clear gain of ten louis. Andrew had "hit it" in good earnest.

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"I think I shall adopt horse-racing as my profession," he laughed, as they cashed the ticket at the *caisse*. "Let's see: forty dollars a race, six races a day, seven days to the week—two-forty—twenty-eight—fourteen—sixteen—sixteen hundred and eighty dollars a week. By Jove! That's not bad, by way of a start!"

"The start's the easiest part of it," observed Radwalader. "Even Vivandière can manage that. It's the finish that counts, and the finish of horse-racing is commonly the penitentiary. It's the only profession where the hard labor comes at the end instead of at the beginning."

"I think I'll hang on to what I've won, then," answered Andrew. "If you've nothing better to do, perhaps you'll help me to spend part of it on a dinner to-night. You know all the best places. And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to walk about a bit, and see the people."

"I accept both proposals with pleasure," said his companion. "We might dine at the Tour d'Argent, if you like. I haven't had one of Frédéric's ducks in a little eternity."

Back of the *tribunes* the crowd was greater now than it had been at the time of their arrival. There was the usual gay commingling of elaborate spring *toilettes*, brilliant parasols, white waistcoats, gloves, and gaiters, and red and blue uniforms; and, all about them, a babble of brilliant nothings. It was, as Radwalader had said, Paris at her best. He resumed his comments, which had been interrupted by the race, punctuating each sentence with a nod, or a few words, in French or English, to passing acquaintances, and flicking the gravel with the point of his stick.

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"I envy you your first impressions, my dear Vane. It's an old story with me, all this, but I remember quite distinctly my first day on a French racecourse. It seemed to me the most wonderful spot on earth. I'd always lived in Philadelphia, and from Philadelphia to Paris is something in the nature of a resurrection. For the first time in my life, I saw people in possession of something to live *for*, instead of merely something to live *on*. There wasn't so much as a wrinkle of anxiety in sight. Then and there, I adopted Paris as my permanent abode. You know this town is a kind of metaphorical fly-paper. When once one has settled, one stops buzzing and banging one's head against the window-screens of circumstance."

"And flops over, and dies?" asked Andrew. "It seems to me that's the unpleasant part about fly-paper."

"I'm not sure of that," said Radwalader. "I'd have to have the fly's word for it. All of us must die in one manner or another, and perhaps being suffocated by a surfeit of sugar and molasses is not the most disagreeable way. However, you are only going to browse along the edges."

"There are some stunning women here," said Andrew.

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"That's singularly *à propos*," replied Radwalader. "Are there any in particular whom you'd like to meet? I know about all of them."

"Oh, do you?" said Andrew. "I hadn't noticed you bow."

For a fraction of a second Radwalader glanced at his companion's face. Then—

"Hadn't you?" he said, with a short laugh. "I'm afraid your eyes have been too busy with the women themselves to take note of my salutations."

The next moment he doffed his hat ceremoniously to a little black-eyed creature with a superb triple string of pearls hanging almost to the waist of her black lace gown.

"That's Suzanne Derval," he explained, as they passed. "She's one of the brightest women in Paris."

"And alone?" said Andrew.

"Her escort," answered Radwalader, with an almost imperceptible pause between the words, "is probably placing his bet. As I said before, if there's any one you want to meet—"

"Well, there is," replied Andrew, colouring a little. "We passed a girl in red back there a bit. It's possible you know her. I'm afraid you think me a good deal of a boy."

"I'm afraid you think a good deal of a girl," laughed Radwalader. "No, my dear chap. Or, rather, if your desire is an evidence of extreme youth, then the majority of men are fit subjects for a *crèche*. Come along, and we'll try to track your scarlet siren."

"We'll not have much difficulty," said Andrew, as they turned. "There she is now. Do you see? By the tree—in red."

"Oh," answered Radwalader, "oh, yes. That's Mirabelle Tremonceau. Your 'red' is *cerise*, as a matter of fact, but that's as near as the average man comes to the colour of a woman's gown."

"I can't imagine one spending much time in learning such things."

"Anywhere but in Paris, perhaps not. Here the knowledge is vital. It's part of one's education—like being able to distinguish a Louis Quatorze chair from a Louis Quinze, or a Fragonard from a Boucher ten feet away. If you want to meet Mademoiselle Tremonceau, I'll be very glad to present you."

"I might wait here while you ask her," suggested Andrew.

"Eh?" said Radwalader. "Oh, yes—by all means."

The girl was talking with an officer of *chasseurs*, on the turf, a short distance away. She was tall and slender, very pale, with magnificent violet eyes and golden-bronze hair. From the gauze *aigrettes* on her hat to the tips of her patent-leather shoes, her costume was absolutely flawless. Her gown, of cherry-coloured *crêpe de Chine*, *pailleté* with silver, breathed from its every fold the talismanic word "Paquin," and the Lalique ornament of emeralds and ruddy gold which swung at her throat by a slender chain said as plainly "Charlier." There was not a dot missing from her veil, not the suggestion of a wrinkle in her white gloves, and not a displeasing note in the harmony of the whole.

"There's nothing wrong about the boy's judgment," was Radwalader's mental comment. "He's picked out the prettiest and best gowned woman in Paris. And it couldn't be better," he added, with an odd little smile.

Mademoiselle Tremonceau greeted him with a nod, a gloved hand, and a "*Comment vas-tu?*"

"*B'en, pas mal, merci*," answered Radwalader. With his left hand he caressed his chin reflectively, and, as if this had been a signal—which indeed it was—the girl turned to the young *chasseur*, who was staring at the intruder out of round, resentful eyes, and dismissed him with a hint.

"You've had fifteen minutes of my time, *mon cher*."

Then, as he retired, discomfited, she faced Radwalader again, and seemed to search his face for the answer to some unspoken question.

"I want to present one of my friends," he said, as if replying. "Mr. Andrew Vane—an American who has been in Paris three days. We'll have to speak English. Have I your permission?"

"You're strangely ceremonious of a sudden," answered Mademoiselle Tremonceau. "I don't seem to remember your asking permission before."

"It was his suggestion," observed Radwalader laconically.

For a moment the girl made no reply. Her questioning look had observably become more keen, and with one finger she picked at the turquoise matrix in the handle of her parasol.

"Well?" she said finally.

"*Galetteux*," said Radwalader. "Go softly, my friend."

Mademoiselle Tremonceau bowed with ineffable dignity.

"You have my gracious permission to present him," she said.

Whistling softly, as was his habit when pleased, the air of "*Au Clair de la Lune*," Radwalader observed their meeting from the corners of his eyes, and was struck, as Mrs. Carnby had been, by Andrew's perfect repose. They spoke in English, of trivialities—Paris, the weather, the crowd, and the victory of Mathias—and, as the saddling-bell rang for the fifth race, all walked out together to the trackside. Here Radwalader left them, to place his bet, and Andrew found two little wooden chairs on which they seated themselves to await his return.

"You and Mr. Radwalader are old friends?" asked the girl.

"On the contrary," said Andrew, "we met for the first time only this morning."

"Oh! And what do you think of him?"

"I find him very agreeable," said Andrew; "a little cynical, perhaps, but clever—and cleverness, to twist an English saying, covers a multitude of sins."

"Yes, he's clever," answered Mademoiselle Tremonceau. "There are the horses. Are you coming to tea?" she added, after a silence, as Radwalader rejoined them.

Radwalader turned to Andrew.

"The poet says that opportunity has no back hair," he observed. "I think we might grasp at this forelock, don't you?"

"Since Mademoiselle Tremonceau is so kind, I should say, by all means."

They watched the race in silence, and then:

"I can find room for you both in the victoria," suggested the girl.

"Better yet!" said Radwalader with alacrity, "provided Vane takes the *strapontin*. The only place where I feel my age is in my knees. Since you've never occupied Mademoiselle Tremonceau's *strapontin*, my dear Vane, you can have no idea of the physical discomfort attendant upon being a

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little lower than an angel. Think of my having won—even a *placé*! Shall we go now? I abhor the crush at the end. Give me a minute to cash my ticket, and then we'll look up the carriage."

"Do you speak French?" said Mademoiselle Tremonceau to Andrew, as Radwalader strolled off in the direction of the *caisse*.

"I seem to be able to say what I want when the occasion arises," he answered, "but I much prefer English. I am trying to adjust myself to new conditions, and I need all my energy for the task, without undertaking a strange language at the same time. You can have no idea how one's first visit to Paris sends preconceived notions tumbling about one's ears. So far, the Eiffel Tower is the only thing which looked as I expected it would. There's a surprise at every turn."

"For example?"

"Well, for example, French women. Even so far as my own town of Boston we know you're beautiful, and beautifully gowned, although nothing short of personal experience can teach one to what an extent. But I've always been brought up to believe that you were so hemmed in by conventionality, so strictly watched, that a chap wasn't allowed so much as to say 'Good-morning' to one of you, so long as you were unmarried, at least, except under the eyes of mothers and fathers and guardians. But it seems that it's not so at all."

As he spoke, Mademoiselle Tremonceau's lips parted in a little smile, and as he paused, she slipped in an apparently irrelevant question.

"Are you married, Mr. Vane?"

"Good gracious, no!" said Andrew. "I suppose I may as well confess that I'm only twenty."

Mademoiselle Tremonceau looked off across the track to where, in the interval preceding the next race, the restless thousands circled to and fro about the betting-booths of the *pelouse*, in the manner of a multitude of ants preparing to carry off a bulky bit of carrion. Then she drew her veil tight, with a charmingly feminine little *moue* which shortened her upper lip, tilted her chin, and set her eyelids fluttering.

"Twenty?" she echoed. "My age precisely. *Tiens! C'est plutô drôlatique ça!* Here's Mr. Radwalader, at last. Did you get your payment? Only twenty-two fifty? Well, that is your other louis back, at all events. Don't you want to run along after the carriage, as long as you know how? Mr. Vane will attend to me, I'm sure, and we'll meet you at the right of the main entrance. Here's the carriage number. Simon is the *brigadier* in charge to-day. Tell him it's for me, and you won't have to wait."

Radwalader undertook this commission with cheerfulness, although the pace at which he started toward the gate was distinctly incompatible with even the most liberal conception of "running along." Evidently he was not unique in his abhorrence of the crush at the end. Many were already making their way from the *pesage*, and the crowd behind the *tribunes* was densest about the *sorties*. Andrew and Mademoiselle Tremonceau followed him, five minutes later.

"I wonder if you mind my taking your arm?" asked the girl. "I'm always a little nervous, going out."

"With pleasure," said Andrew, adding, as her glove touched his sleeve, "I was going to suggest it, but I don't know French etiquette as yet, and I was afraid I might be presuming."

He was unconscious that, as they passed through the throng, many heads were turned, among them that of the young officer of *chasseurs*, who drew the end of his mustache between his lips, and gnawed it savagely. A perfectly appointed victoria, drawn up at the edge of the driveway, was awaiting them, with Radwalader standing at the step.

It was close upon seven o'clock when the two men emerged from Mademoiselle Tremonceau's apartments on the Avenue Henri Martin, and, hailing a passing cab, set off for the Tour d'Argent. Radwalader evinced no desire to talk, as they bowled across to and then down the Champs Elysées, and Andrew was conscious of being grateful for the silence. He wanted to think. He did not wholly understand the hour and a half which had just gone by. There had been no sign of Mademoiselle Tremonceau's family. Tea was served in a *salon* crowded with elaborate furniture, and softly illumined by rose-shaded electric globes on bronze *appliques*. Liveried servants came and went noiselessly, through tapestry curtains, and over an inlaid floor, polished to mirror-like brilliance, and strewn with mounted skins. The double *marqueterie* tea-table gleamed with a silver samovar and candlesticks, Baccarat glass, and thin, cream-coloured cups and saucers, with a crest in raised gold. Here and there, huge Gloire de Dijon roses leaned sleepily from silver vases, and, on a little stand, a great bunch of wild violets breathed summer from a blue Sèvres bowl. An indefinable atmosphere of luxury and languor pervaded the room. From the girl herself came a faint hint of some strangely sweet, but wholly unfamiliar, fragrance, which Andrew had not noted in the open air. He watched her, fascinated, as her slender white hands, with their blazing jewels, went to and fro among the cups and saucers. Her every movement was deliciously and suggestively feminine, as had been her tightening of her veil, an hour before, and exquisitely languid and deliberate, as if the day had been a thousand hours long instead of twenty-four. She said but little, Radwalader maintaining a running thread of his half-banter, half-philosophy, with its ingenious double-meanings and contortions of the commonplace, whereby, in some fashion of his own, he contrived to simulate and stimulate conviction.

Andrew had found, presently, that he was growing sleepy. The abrupt change from the cool air of outer afternoon to the perfume-laden atmosphere of Mademoiselle Tremonceau's *salon*, the drone of Radwalader's voice, the soft light, in contrast to the sunshine they had left—all contributed to his drowsiness. Once, for nearly a minute, the whole room melted, as it were, into one golden-gray mist, through which silver and glass and fabrics glowed only as harmonious notes of colour, and wherein the face of his hostess seemed to float like a reflection in troubled

water. Then, as suddenly, every detail of his surroundings appeared to bulge at him out of the haze, and stood fixed and clear. For an instant he thought that Radwalader had raised his voice. He seemed to be speaking very loudly; but, when the first nervous start had passed, Andrew realized that this was his own imagining, and that neither of his companions had noticed his momentary somnolence.

At the end, he had held Mademoiselle Tremonceau's hand for a second beyond the limit of convention. She made no motion to withdraw it, but looked him frankly in the eyes.

"We've been neglecting you, haven't we?" she said. "Mr. Radwalader and I are such old friends, that we're inclined to selfishness, and apt to forget that our talk is not as interesting to others as to ourselves. Perhaps you'll come in to tea on Tuesday, about five, and I'll try to prove myself a more considerate hostess."

"Thank you," said Andrew. "I shall be very pleased—though I suspect you are undertaking the impossible."

The *fiacre* was passing the Rond Point when Radwalader spoke.

"This is the hour when Paris seems to me supremely to deserve her title of siren," he said. "In spring and summer, at least, I always try to pass it out of doors. There is a fascination for me, that never grows stale, in the coming of twilight, when the street-lamps begin to wink, and the *cafés* are lighting up. Did you ever feel softer air or see a more tenderly saffron sky? And this constant murmur of passing carriages, this hum of voices, broken, more often than anywhere else on earth, by laughter—isn't it *life*, as one never understands the word elsewhere? Isn't it full of suggestion and appeal? I've never been able to analyze the charm of the Champs Elysées at sunset, more nearly than to say that it seems to blot out one's remembrance of everything in the world that is sordid and commonplace, and to bring boldly to the fore the significance of all that is sweet and gay. Can you imagine considering the price of stocks or the drift of politics just now? I can't. I think of flowers, and Burgundy in slender-stemmed glasses, and *tziganes* playing waltz music, and women with good teeth, laughing. I smell roses and *trèfle*. I see mirrors, and candlesticks with openwork shades, silver over red, and sleek waiters bending down with bottles swathed in napkins. I hear violins and the swish of silk skirts. I taste caviar—and I *feel*—that I have underestimated Providence, after all!"

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"There is no Paris but Paris, and Radwalader is her prophet!" laughed Andrew.

"That suggests a religion," said the other, "and I suppose, all said and done, that Paris *is* my religion. How did you like Mirabelle Tremonceau?"

"Even more than I expected."

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"That's well—and very unusual. One almost always expects too much of a beautiful woman. Beauty has this in common with an inherited fortune—that it's apt to paralyze individual effort. Looking into mirrors and cutting coupons don't leave one much time for anything else. But she's exceptional. You're right in liking her, and what's more, you'll probably like her better and better as time goes on."

"She asked me if I was married," said Andrew.

"Did she?" answered Radwalader. "Well—are you?"

"No, assuredly not."

"Engaged, perhaps."

Instead of replying, Andrew glanced curiously at his companion, his lips set in a thin, straight line. Radwalader met his glance fairly.

"I beg your pardon, Vane," he said immediately. "That was unwarranted impertinence, which you're quite justified in resenting. I'm too prone to trifling, and the remark slipped out thoughtlessly. Pray consider it unsaid."

"With the best will in the world," said Andrew heartily. "There is nothing more admirable, I always think, than a frank apology."

In the words there was a faint, curiously suggestive echo of the tone in which Radwalader was wont to voice his glittering generalities.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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### MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

Madame Raoul Palffy would, in all probability, have been intensely surprised and entirely incredulous had any one informed her that hers was an irritating personality. But the fact remained. She was flagrantly complacent, and her placidity enraged one immeasurably, and goaded nervous temperaments to the verge of frenzy. Tradespeople had been known to grit their teeth and swear almost audibly at her, and at least two guards upon the Métropolitain had lost their positions because her leisurely manner of locomotion had moved them irresistibly to breaches of the courteous treatment enjoined upon them by the General Manager's notice to the public.

Madame Palffy was a large, florid person with a partiality for jet and crimson velvet, and whose passing, much in the manner of a frigate under full sail, was apt to be fatal to fragile ornaments standing unwarily too near to table-edges. About her there was always a suggestion of imminent

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explosion, due to her chronic shortness of breath, the extreme snugness of her gowns, and the fashion in which her pudgy palms, unmercifully compressed into white gloves two sizes too small, crowded desperately out of the little ovals across which the top buttons yearned toward their proper holes. Harmoniously, her face was fat, and dappled all over with ruddy pink, with the eyes, nose, and mouth crowded together in the centre, as if for sociability's sake, or in fear of sliding off the smooth slopes of her cheeks and chin. Her hair, with its variety of puffs and curls, appeared to have been laid out by a landscape gardener.

As for Raoul Palffy, all that one was apt to remember about him was the fact that he had married a Miss Barrister of Worcester. He was as completely eclipsed by this injudicious proceeding as if he had been elected Vice-President of the United States. He closely resembled a frog on the point of suffocation. With a loyalty worthy of a better cause, he imbibed vast quantities of the wine of his native Bordeaux, and became each year more shockingly apoplectic in appearance. Out of his wife's sight, he swelled magnificently, like a red balloon, and, between ignorance and exaggeration, was hardly on bowing terms with veracity: in her presence, he was another man. It was more than anything as if some one had taken a pin to the red balloon. As a natural result of their relative assertiveness, the couple moved, for the most part, not in the French society to which Monsieur Palffy's connections warranted their aspiring, but in that of the Colony, where his wife's pretensions and her deplorable mismanipulation of her adopted tongue were less conspicuously burlesque. After twenty years of Paris, Madame Palffy still said *nom de plume* and *café noir*.

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It was to renew acquaintance with parents so curiously contrasted that Margery Palffy had returned from ten years of almost continuous residence in the States. To say that she proved a surprise to them would be to do but faint justice to the mental perturbation with which they surveyed this tall, self-possessed young person, who was, in practically every particular, a total stranger. Her father, with his characteristic lack of enterprise, had promptly given her up. He had neither the faculty of rendering, nor that of inspiring, affection; and this his daughter seemed, from the very outset, to understand, and tacitly to accept. They rarely met, except at dinner, and then with such a desperate lack of common interests as prevented any interchange of conversation beyond the merest commonplaces. Madame Palffy, on the contrary, made an earnest, if inept, attempt to fill, in her daughter's life, a place which she had long since forfeited; and, to the best of her ability, Margery strove to meet her half-way. But the gap made by their years of separation was now too wide to be effectually bridged. Madame Palffy was artificial from the summit of her elaborate *coiffure* to the tips of her inadequately ample shoes: her daughter, in every detail of her sound and sensible make-up, was a convincing product of all that is best, sincerest, and most wholesome in American education. The two could no more mix than oil and water. It was to Mrs. Carnby and her husband that Margery turned for sympathy, with an instant recognition of qualities appealingly akin to her own: and these two received her with open arms. For them, three months had sufficed to render Margery Palffy indispensable, and the same period served to prove to the girl, not only her need of friendship, but that here lay the means of its satisfaction. As Madame Palffy complacently observed to Mrs. Carnby.

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"I think that Margery feels that there's no place like home."

And as Mrs. Carnby replied, with extreme relish:

"I'm sure of it. It must be a most comforting conviction!"

Margery Palffy, whose attitude toward the society to which she was a comparatively recent recruit was sufficiently indicated by her desire to be called "Miss" instead of "Mademoiselle," was accustomed to reserve her Sunday afternoons for Mr. Carnby. They would go to the Bois, to walk and watch the driving, or take a *bateau mouche* to Suresnes and return, or even slip out to Versailles or St. Germain. Jeremy was a man of small enthusiasms, but he shared with his wife a profound affection, of the type which is always pathetic in the childless, for this tall, slender girl, as fresh and sweet as a ripe fig, grown on the family thistle of the Palffys. An impulse, which, in the light of its results, could only be regarded as an inspiration, had prompted Madame Palffy to send her daughter, at the age of nine, to be educated in the States. A sound and rational school in Connecticut, and ten vacations in the superbly invigorating air of the North Shore under the care of a sensibly indulgent aunt, had forthwith performed a miracle. A thin, brown child, with an affected lisp, was now grown straight and tall, with an eye to measure a putt or a friend, a hand which knew the touch of a tiller and a rein, and a voice to win a dog, a child, or a man. Margery Palffy was very beautiful withal, with her russet-brown hair, her finely chiselled features, and her confident smile. She impressed one immediately as having arranged her hair herself—by bunching it all up together, and then giving it one inspirited twist which accomplished more than all the system in the world. Some one—not her mother!—knew what kind of gown she ought to wear, but—what was more important—she knew how to wear it. One would have said that her eyes were by Helleu and her nose by George du Maurier. Men looked to their hearts when her mouth was open, and to their consciences when it was closed—tight-closed! A laugh to make them worship her, a frown to make them despise themselves, a suggestion that she was capable of giving all she would expect from another, a somewhat stronger suggestion that she would be apt to expect a considerable deal, very clean-cut, very sane, very good form—such was Margery Palffy at what might be called her worst. As for Margery Palffy at her best, as yet even the most casual of Colony gossips had never more than hinted at a love-affair.

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Madame Palffy having attended two church services, and observed with gratification that her new bonnet was far more imposing than the bonnets, old and new, of her fellow worshippers, had now sought the seclusion of her Empire boudoir. She was, above all things, consistent. In this sacred spot she ventured to lay aside her society manner, but, beyond this, she made no concessions to privacy. Her lounging-gown would have been presentable at a garden-party, and

she devoted five minutes to rearranging her hair, before sinking massively upon the *chaise-longue*, and giving her thoughts free rein.

An unusually brilliant week had drawn to a close the evening before. Madame Palffy's dinner-table had groaned beneath its burden of silver and chiselled glass, and her box at "Louise" had presented to the auditorium such a background of white linen and vicuna as had sent poisonous darts to the hearts of a dozen ambitious and observant mothers.

The reason was not far to seek. From the moment of her *début*, two months before, Margery Palffy had been a tremendous success. Her beauty, her novelty, her shrewd wit and unfailing gaiety had swept through the Colony as a sickle through corn. Madame Palffy smiled to herself as she reviewed the past few weeks. Her daughter's had been a name to conjure with. [77]

But, almost immediately, the smile became a sigh. Beneath her satisfaction in Margery's triumph, the ambitious lady felt that there was something lacking—and that something was a complete understanding of the girl herself. Since her return from the States, her mother had been slowly and reluctantly forced to the conviction that there was that in her nature which it was beyond one's power to grasp, and her apparent frankness and simplicity made the failure to read her doubly hard to analyze. Her interest in life and the society world about her was unquestionable. Fresh and unspoiled, she trod the social labyrinth undeviatingly, received the flatteries, even the open devotion, of half a hundred men with caution, and remained—herself. And Madame Palffy, to whom social success was a guarantee of a status so little lower than the seraphim as to make the difference unworthy of consideration, looked with growing admiration upon that of her beautiful daughter, and treasured every evidence thereof deep in her pompous heart. The difficulty lay in the fact that Margery impressed not only the world in general by her dignity, but abashed her ambitious parent as well. Madame Palffy was content to have her daughter talk in parables, if she would, and be as impartial as justice itself, but afterwards, when the lights were out and the guests had departed, she wanted the parables explained and the preferences laid bare. And this was precisely the confidential relation which she had never been able to establish. In public she figured naturally as Margery's confidant and mentor. In private she was, in reality, hardly nearer to her than was the newest of her new acquaintances. [78]

In this state of affairs Madame Palffy distinctly perceived all the elements of a dilemma. As was naturally to be expected, her daughter had no sooner been restored to her, than the ambitious lady's mind began to wrestle with the problem of a suitable marriage—or "alliance," as she preferred to think of it. To this intent, she had selected the Vicomte de Boussac, whom she was wont to call, for no apparent reason, "one of her boys." Nothing was further from the Vicomte's intention than a marriage *à la mode*, imbued as he was with the national predilection for marriage *au mois*, but he had a habit—had De Boussac—of describing himself as *enchanté* with whatsoever might be proposed to him by one of the opposite sex. He was *enchanté* to meet Madame's beautiful daughter, *enchanté* to act as their escort on any and every occasion, *enchanté*, above all, at Madame's disregard of conventionality, whereby he was permitted to enjoy frequent *tête-à-têtes* with Margery. But he had an eye for the boundary-line. He smiled with inimitable charm at Madame Palffy's transparent hints, derived considerable diversion from her daughter's society, and, throughout, behaved in a manner nothing short of exemplary. At the end of three months, during which Margery's *début* had come and gone, the wistful matchmaker was frankly in despair. [79]

A beneficent Providence had begrudged Madame Palffy a very liberal allowance of diplomacy, and, this failing, she was now resolved upon a desperate move, nothing less than a complete revelation of her plans, and an appeal to Margery for confirmation of her hopes. Whenever she considered this approaching ordeal, she seemed suddenly to lose a cube-shaped section of her vital organs. Just now the sensation was oppressive: for she had taken the decisive step that very morning, and requested Margery to attend her at five o'clock; and, over there on the mantel, the hands of her little ormolu clock were galloping inconsiderately over the last quarter before the fatal hour. Even as she glanced apprehensively at its face, the tinkle of the five strokes broke the silence, and she had barely time to secure the lavender salts from her dressing-table, when there came a tap at the door.

"Entrez!"

Margery had been walking, and with her entrance into the room came an indescribable suggestion of the open air. Her face was radiant, and the violets at her belt, brought suddenly from the slight chill without into the warmth of her mother's boudoir, seemed to heave a perfumed sigh of relief. The girl's brown eyes, aglow with youth and health, the proud poise of her head, and her firm hands, ungloved and guiltless of rings, were all in marked contrast to the heavy woman throned upon the divan, and languidly sniffing at her salts. It was a confronting of nature and art, unmistakably to the latter's disadvantage. Somehow, the hopelessness of her self-appointed task was more than ever apparent to the ambitious Madame Palffy. [80]

"And where do you suppose I've been?" began Margery.

"Not to church, I know," said her mother. "I half expected to see you, but I was alone in the pew."

"No, not to church. Once a day is enough, surely. I've been with Mr. Carnby to the Jardin d'Acclimatation."

"Good gracious, my dear, what a plebeian expedition! What *were* you doing—visiting the *serres*?"

"Nothing half so dignified. We were at the menagerie, feeding the monkeys with gingernuts."

Madame Palffy simply gasped. There are some situations with which words are impotent to deal.

"Monkeys," continued Margery, "are adorable. They are sufficiently human to be typical, and then there's the advantage that one can stare at them to one's heart's content, without being thought ill-mannered. I saw lots of our friends—Mr. Radwalder, for instance, as vain as life and twice as loquacious; and one haughty young creature who held himself aloof, despising the rest, and taking no pains to conceal it. That was Monsieur de Boussac. His manner was so unmistakable that I actually found myself bowing, as our eyes met."

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"Margery!"

"It's the solemn truth, mother; the Vicomte has a dual existence."

"But my dear child—the monkey-house! What *could* Jeremy Carnby have been thinking of, to take you to such a place?"

"He didn't. I took him."

"But one never knows what one might catch there—typhoid—or—or fleas, my dear!"

Madame Palffy shuddered, and returned to her salts.

"Fleas, mother? I never thought of that possibility, but if I had, it would only have been an added inducement. Never having met a flea, I am sure I should enjoy the experience. You know what somebody says? 'Incomparably the bravest of all the creatures of God.' And, above all things, I adore courage."

Here was an auspicious beginning to a serious conversation! In sheer desperation, Madame Palffy assumed her society manner.

"Margery," she said, "you're quite old enough to take care of yourself; though, to speak frankly, you have a somewhat peculiar method of doing so. Let us abandon the monkeys for the present. I have something to say to you. I—I—"

She hesitated for an instant, and then proceeded resolutely.

"I've been thinking of you a great deal, of late, and you must forgive me if I speak unreservedly to you. It's because of my affection for you, and my deep interest in your welfare."

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She did not see the slight contraction of her daughter's eyebrows, and it was well for her peace of mind that she did not. It argued ill for a sympathetic reception of her carefully formulated appeal.

"I'm sure, my dear mother, that it's very far from my desire to resent anything you say. Why should I? Has any one a better right to speak—er—unreservedly?"

"I've been more than proud of you always," continued Madame Palffy, "*more* than proud, my dear. You've been a great comfort to me, and, if I do say it, a wonderful success in the Colony. I remember no *débutante* in ten years who has received so much attention, and the fact that it has not spoiled you shows how worthy of it all you are. And now," she added, with an uneasy smile, "for *la grande serieux*."

Again that curious drawing together of Miss Palffy's eyebrows.

"*Le grand serieux?*" she repeated. She detested feeling her way in the dark, and now groped dexterously for a clue. "That's usually taken to mean something quite alien to our present conversation."

"Not at all," said her mother, catching at this opening, "not at *all* alien, my dear. In fact, Margery, what I want to ask you is this. Er—have you ever thought of marrying?"

"Yes—often," said Margery promptly.

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The two words were characteristic of their curious relations, as Madame Palffy realized, with a little inward sigh of despair. They answered her question fully, and they answered it not at all.

"You don't understand me, perhaps," she went on. "I mean, have you ever seen—here in Paris, for instance—any particular man whom it has seemed to you you might—er—love? Now—there is De Boussac—"

"Ah!"

"Wait a moment, my dear. Let me finish. I'll not conceal from you that it has been a dear wish of mine to see you married to him. I've known him since he was a baby. He's titled, rich, very talented, and more than moderately good-looking. His position is irreproachable, and his family goes straight back indefinitely."

She stopped nervously. The speech which she had mentally prepared, descriptive of De Boussac's desirability, had been some ten times this length. In some fashion, Margery's eyes had shorn it of verbiage, and reduced it, as it were, to its lowest terms.

"But, my dear mother, this is the first inkling I've had of any such idea. I can't imagine that Monsieur de Boussac has ever breathed a word on the subject. Don't you think the first mention should come from him? I've no reason to suppose that he cares a straw for me."

"He does—I know he does," broke in Madame Palffy eagerly. "You're quite wrong in supposing he's never spoken of it. Remember, these things are managed differently over here. You have the American idea. In Paris one speaks first to the girl's parents."

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Margery shrugged her shoulders. A kind of instinct told her that she must ask no questions if she would be told no lies.

"And there's another objection," she said. "I don't *want* to marry him. He may have money, but money isn't everything. Indeed, it's entered very near the foot of my list of the things to be desired in life. As to position, my own is sufficiently good to make his immaterial. We go back indefinitely ourselves, you know; although, to be sure, I've found some things in the family records which seemed to suggest that it might have been better not to have gone back so far. Last, but very far from least, I don't love him, and, in view of the fact that, if he really had the

slightest feeling for me, I should, in all probability, have known of it long ago, I must say, my dear mother, that your suggestion strikes me as having all the elements of a screaming farce."

At this point Madame Palffy applied a minute handkerchief to her eyes, and began to weep softly.

"How cruelly you speak!" she moaned, "and I—I meant it all for the best."

Fortunately, Mrs. Carnby had never seen Madame Palffy cry. As it was, she imagined that nothing about that lady could be more irritating than her smile. But Margery, under whose faultlessly-fitting jacket beat the tenderest and most considerate of hearts, was moved. She watched her mother in silence for a moment, and then went across to the divan, and, kneeling beside it, took Madame Palffy's available hand in hers. [85]

"I did speak cruelly," she said, "and I'm sorry. Let me see if I can't put it more considerately, so that you'll understand. Love is—has always been—to me the most sacred thing on earth. I've watched, as every girl must watch, for its coming, believing that its touch would transform all life. There can be, it seems to me, but one man in the world able to do that, and I'm content to wait for him, without trying to hurry the future, or aid fate or Providence, whichever it may be, in the disposal of my heart. I've been glad all my life that we were not rich enough for our means to be an object. Of course, poverty has barred many out from happiness, but it pleases me to think that when a man seeks me, there can be no doubt that it is for myself alone. Not only that, but I've hoped that he would be poor as well, and it's been my pride that, when I searched my heart, I found that wish deep within it, without affectation, without a hint of uncertainty. I'm old-fashioned, I suppose, and out of touch with the times, but I hold the faith that was before riches or social position came into the world—I hold to love, the love of a strong man for a pure woman, the love of a good woman for an honest man! Let me but start honestly, with no motive that I am ashamed to tell, no thought governing my action save reverence for those three great responsibilities—love, marriage, and motherhood, and I have no fear of what may come." [86]

As the girl was speaking, Madame Palffy's sobs grew fainter, and finally she forgot to dab at her eyes with the morsel of lace. She was interested.

"It's this great reverence which I have for love," continued Margery, "that prompted me to answer impatiently when you spoke of Monsieur de Boussac. You didn't mean to hurt me, of course: I know that. But, to me, it was as if you'd torn away the veil before my holy of holies, and cast out the image I had cherished there, and were thrusting a grinning golden idol in its place. I want love to come into my life freely—not to be invited to dinner, and announced by the butler. There will be no question in my mind when it has really come, no measuring of the man with a yardstick. I shall feel that he is for me, even before he asks me to be his. Above all, the question must come from his lips, and the answer be for his ears alone. No man loving me as I would be loved would be content to employ an ambassador."

Here Madame Palffy came to herself, and moaned again.

"I don't mean to reproach you, mother. I believe, and I'm very glad to believe, that you've always had my happiness in view. But, in the nature of things, there are many points upon which our ideas are bound to differ, and this is one. You thought it best that I should be educated in America, and you mustn't be surprised to find me American as a result. Look back. Do you realize that I've not spent six full months in Paris since I was a little girl? Now that I've come back to you, I can't readjust all my ideas in a moment. I want to please you, dear, in any way I can, but I'm an American all through, and you—well, perhaps you're more French than you realize, yourself. We must try to grow together, but in many ways it will not be easy. We must be patient with each other, dear." [87]

"I see what you mean," said Madame Palffy mournfully. "We're as far apart as the poles."

"Not quite that, I think," answered Margery, with a smile, "but, in some respects, three thousand miles. Let us try to remember that: it will make things easier."

"It's a terrible disappointment to me," came lugubriously from the handkerchief.

"I'm sorry," answered Margery, "very sorry. But I'm sure that I could never love Monsieur de Boussac, and sure that I could never even believe in his love unless he himself should tell me of it. I think we understand each other now, mother. If I'd had any idea of this before, I might have spared you this talk. But, painful as it has been, it has, at all events, brought us nearer together. Don't let us speak of it again." [88]

Then Madame Palffy unaccountably touched her zenith.

"No," she agreed, rising majestically from the divan, "no, we'll not speak of it again. It must make no change between us. I love you very dearly, Margery, and I wish I could have seen you his wife, but if it cannot be, that's all there is to it. Let's dress for dinner, my dear," and, bending over, she kissed the air affectionately, a half-inch from her daughter's cheek. "You're a strange girl," she added, "and I don't pretend to understand you. But choose your own husband. I shall like him for your sake."

As Margery left the room, Madame Palffy turned to the mirror, and surveyed with a sigh the ravages which this emotional half-hour had made in her appearance. For the three following days she was a mute martyr, and relished the *rôle* immeasurably.

Margery, dressing for dinner, hummed softly to herself, smiling as no one of her Paris friends had ever seen her smile.

"Ah, Moon of my Delight, that knows no wane,  
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again!"—

Andrew Vane had played an accompaniment to that a hundred times, in her aunt's big shore



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## CHAPTER V.

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### THE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT.

On the following Thursday morning, the bell of St. Germain-des-Prés was striking the hour of eleven when Monsieur Jules Vicot opened his eyes, instantly closed them again, and groaned. It was the hour which he disliked more than any other of the twenty-four, this of awakening, and from day to day it did not differ in essential details. The weather might be hot or cold, fair or foul, wet or dry—that was one thing and not important. What *was* important—what, in the estimation of Monsieur Vicot, distinguished this hour so unenviably from its fellows, was the variety of distressing physical symptoms which, in his own person, inevitably accompanied it. They were symptoms long familiar to Monsieur Vicot—a feeling under his eyelids which appeared to indicate the presence of coarse sand; a throbbing of the heart which seemed, inexplicably, to be taking place in his throat; a dull pain at his temples and back of his ears which prompted him to hold his head sedulously balanced, lest a sudden movement to right or left occasion an acuter pang; finally, a taste on his tongue which suggested a commingling of fur, blotting-paper, and raw quinces.

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Presently Monsieur Vicot opened his eyes once more and fixed them upon the window, from which, from his position, nothing was visible save sky of an intense blue. Against this background a number of small reddish-brown blotches swam slowly to and fro, and among these tiny whorls of a light gray colour expanded and contracted with inconceivable rapidity. At one time these symptoms had caused him peculiar uneasiness. Now he ignored them. They were less disturbing to his equanimity than the remarkable twitching of his fingers. For two years he had made a point of keeping his hands in the side pockets of his jacket, save when he found it absolutely necessary to use them. He no longer made gestures. They are desirable as aids to expression, but only when steady.

The majority of men, in waking, apply themselves to consideration of the day which lies before them. It was Monsieur Jules Vicot's custom, on the contrary, to undertake a mental review of the night which lay behind. The review was not always complete. Often there were gaps, and, more frequently, he found himself completely at a loss to account for his return to his room on the *cinquième* of 70, Rue St. Benoit, and the indisputable fact that he was in bed, with his clothes reposing, with something not unrelated to order, on the solitary chair.

Now, as he surveyed it, he assured himself for the thousandth time that it was not a cheerful room. Abundant sunlight, the recompense of Nature for six flights of stairs, was its sole redeeming virtue. For the rest, everything belonging to Monsieur Vicot was applied to some use entirely foreign to the original purpose for which it had been designed. An ink-stand served him as a candlestick, his chair was at once table and clothes-rack, a ramshackle sofa played the *rôle* of bed, and a frouzy plush table-cover was his rug. An astonishing accumulation of cigarette-ends and empty bottles suggested slovenliness in the occupant. On the contrary, they stood for his economical instincts. It is not every one who knows that twenty cigarette-ends make a pipe-ful of tobacco, and that as many empty brandy-flasks may be exchanged for a full half-pint, but the knowledge, if rare, is useful.

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"It is a pig-pen," said Monsieur Jules Vicot to himself, "and very appropriate at that!"

Then he set to work upon his matutinal review of the preceding night. His recollections were more than usually hazy. After a wretched dinner at *La Petite Chaise*, rendered yet more unpalatable by the proprietor's unpleasant references to certain previous repasts, as yet unpaid, came a distinct hour or so of leaning on the parapet of the Quai d'Orléans, in dreamy contemplation of a man clipping a black poodle on the cobblestones below; then another period, of gradually lessening clearness, in a little wine-shop on the Rue de Beaune; then—nothing.

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"Well, I was drunk," reflected Monsieur Vicot; but again manifested his dissimilarity from the majority of men by not committing himself in respect to his intentions for the future.

He arose with an air of languor, yawned, looked dubiously at one trembling hand, shook his head, and then surveyed himself in a triangular bit of looking-glass tacked against the wall.

Candour is oftentimes a depressing thing—particularly in a mirror. Monsieur Vicot's glass showed him a clean-shaven face almost devoid of colour; eyes, the blackness of which seemed to have soaked out, like water-colour through blotting-paper, into gray-blue circles on the lower lids; hair almost white; a thin nose with widely dilated nostrils; a tremulous mouth; and a weak, receding chin. It was a face which might have been handsome before becoming a document with the signatures of the seven cardinal vices written large upon it. Now it was evidence which even Monsieur Vicot could not ignore. He leered defiantly at it, mixed himself a stiff drink of cheap brandy and water, and forthwith applied himself to his toilet.

Seeing the result which he presently achieved, one perceived him to be a man of a certain ability under crushing limitations. With a broken comb, a well-worn brush, which he applied, with admirable impartiality, to both his hair and his coat, a morsel of soap, and some cold water, Monsieur Vicot accomplished what was little short of a miracle; and when, a half-hour later, he emerged upon the Rue St. Benoit and turned toward the boulevard, his appearance was akin to respectability. Luck and his face were against him, but incidental obstacles he contrived to

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overcome.

He took a *mazagran* and a roll at the Deux Magots, fortified himself with a package of *vertes*, and swung aboard a passing tram. At one o'clock he was sauntering down the Rue de Villejust, with his hands in his pockets. Suddenly he stopped, looked intently for an instant at a certain window on a level with his eye, and then went on at a brisker gait. He had abruptly become cheerful, and that for no apparent reason. There is, commonly, nothing particularly enlivening in the aspect of a blue jar in an apartment window; yet that, and nothing else, was what had arrested the attention of Monsieur Jules Vicot, and brought the tune he was whistling to his lips.

Mr. Thomas Radwalader occupied a *rez de chaussée* on the Rue de Villejust, which differed from the ordinary run of Paris apartments in that its doorway gave directly on the street, independent of the *loge de concierge*, and, what was more important, of the *concierges* themselves. Yet the latter held that Radwalader was a gentleman of becomingly regular habits. He kept one servant, a *bonne* on the objectively safe side of fifty, who cooked and marketed for him; maintained, throughout his quarters, a neatness which would have put the proverbial pin to shame; and, in general, ministered to his material well-being more competently than the average man-servant. That she was not likely to wear his clothes, use his razors, or pilfer his tobacco was half a bachelor's domestic problem solved at the very outset. On the debit side of the account, she potted eternally, and was an ardent advocate of protracted conversation; but these tendencies Radwalader had managed, in the course of their five years of association, to temper to a considerable degree; so that now she was as near to perfection in her particular sphere as a mere mortal is apt to be. Her name was Eugénie Dufour, and in her opinion the entire system of mundane and material things revolved about the person of Thomas Radwalader.

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In view of his avowed love of luxury, the latter's quarters were distinguished by severe, almost military, simplicity. Without exception, the rooms were carpeted, but there were no draperies either at doors or windows. The *salon*, of which the solitary window opened on the street, was Louis Seize in style, with straight-backed chairs, upholstered in dark-red brocade, a grand piano which had belonged to Radwalader's mother, and a large print of the period, simply framed, in the exact centre of each wall-panel. There were no ornaments, save a white Sèvres bust of Marie Antoinette on the mantel, two reading-lamps, and a few odds and ends of silver, ivory, and enamel, which had the guilty air of unavoidable gifts, rather than the easy assurance of chosen *bibelots*. Some books in old bindings, a stand of music, and a tea-table with its service—and that was all.

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Separated from this *salon* by double doors was what had formerly been a bedroom, but which now, for want of a better name, Radwalader called *La Boîte*. This was his *sanctum sanctorum*, wherein one might reasonably have looked to find the confusion dear to the happy estate of bachelorhood. But here again was evident, though in a lesser degree, the austerity which characterized the *salon*. One naturally expected a litter of periodicals, pipes, and papers; but, on the contrary, the large table was almost clear, and the interior of the writing-desk, which stood open by the window, revealed only symmetrical piles of note-paper, envelopes, and blotters, and writing paraphernalia of the ordinary office variety. In the chimney-place was a brazier on a low tripod, and from this, each morning, the worthy Eugénie removed a quantity of ashes—ashes which had entered the room in the form of Radwalader's correspondence of the previous day. In one corner stood a small safe, and on top of this were boxes of cigars, and cigarettes of eight or ten varieties, but all arranged as methodically as the contents of the desk. The remaining wall-space was occupied by book-shelves, in which no single volume was an inch out of line.

The opinion of Radwalader's *concierges* as to the regularity of his habits was seemingly based on fact. Eugénie lived with her brother in the Chaussée d'Antin, and went to and fro every day, regardless of weather, on top of the Rue Taitbout-La Murette tram. With characteristic regularity and promptitude, she had never once failed, during the five years of her service, to awaken her *patron* at eight o'clock. Radwalader invariably replied with a cheerful "*Bien!*" and five minutes later was splashing in his bath. His coffee was served at nine, his mornings, in general, spent in *La Boîte*. He took *déjeuner* at one, and then went out, returning only to dress for dinner, which he rarely had at home. Midnight found him again in *La Boîte*, bending over a book or some papers at his desk. Then only it was that the door of his safe stood open. In all this there was, assuredly, no evidence of aught but tastes so quiet as to savour of asceticism. But then Radwalader was a man who believed in a place for everything and everything in its place.

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His visitors were few, save only on Thursday afternoons, when he was known to be at home. Then a dozen or so of men lounged in his *salon*, which was reinforced for the occasion by chairs from the other rooms, and several little tables for whiskey and tobacco. Eugénie did not appear. They were served, when there was need of service, by a middle-aged man-servant with a furtive eye and a hand that trembled nervously when handling glasses and decanters; for which reason those of Radwalader's guests to whom the situation was most familiar preferred to help themselves. They reproached him, when more important topics were exhausted, with the apparent decrepitude of this retainer, whose name was Jules. But their host made it plain that he had good and sufficient reasons for employing him. He had grown up in his mother's family in Philadelphia, said Radwalader, first as page and then as butler. When the Radwalader millions went by the board, Jules had remained with the family through sheer loyalty, accepting but half the wages he had formerly earned. Once he had even saved Radwalader's life in the surf at Atlantic City. Later he had taken to drink, gone rapidly to pieces, and, at last, had been discharged as a hopeless case. They had given him a reference, for charity's sake, on the strength of which he had found a place as travelling valet; but once in Paris, his old weakness had returned, and so he had lost his position, and never chanced upon another. Then Radwalader had found him stranded, begging on the boulevards, and, for the sake of the old days, had given him

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clothes and money, and found him occasional employment, such as this Thursday service, by means of which he contrived to eke out a living, such as it was. At other times, when he was not drunk, he drove a cab for the Compagnie Urbaine. (This last, the most incongruous feature of Radwalader's explanation, was, curiously enough, the only one which had the slightest foundation in fact!)

"My best quality is gratitude," Radwalader concluded. "He saved my life; so I give him such of my clothes as become unfit for publication, and pay him five francs every Thursday for not being of the least assistance. I'm afraid you'll have to put up with him. It's a case of 'love me, love my dog.'"

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And this, under its thin veneer of cynicism, was taken as an indication of a very admirable instinct on Radwalader's part, for which men admired him. They continued to make fun of Jules, but, after this defence of him, they nodded to him on entering, and spoke to him by name.

Andrew Vane joined the gathering in Radwalader's rooms on the Thursday following their Sunday at Auteuil. It was observable that, without exception, the guests were men who had done, or were going to do, something out of the ordinary. No one of them seemed to be in the present tense of achievement. They talked slowly, choosing their words with noticeable care, with an eye to their effect, and switching ever and anon in a new direction, as irresponsibly as a fly in mid-air. To Andrew the atmosphere was not only that of another city, but of another world. From art to literature, from literature to music, from music to the stage, the talk drifted, punctuated with names of men and things whereof he did not remember ever to have heard. Save for their air of having but just stepped out of a barber's chair, they were men of a general type familiar to him—well dressed, evenly poised. The scene might have been Boston or New York, save for one thing: in all that was said, there was never the most remote hint of actual interest. The opinions were like those of more than usually brilliant schoolboys, putting into their own phraseology certain fundamental axioms. The speakers, with the sole exception of Radwalader, gave the impression of being unutterably tired, and of playing with words with the unique intent of passing the time. Your American has but little leisure for grammar, and less for eloquence, but in what he says there is always present the vivifying spark of vital and intimate concern. His theories are jewels in the rough, but one is conscious of the ceaseless clink-clink of the tool which is busily transforming them into fame and fortune. The men in Radwalader's *salon* were toying with gems long since cut and polished, whose sole virtue lay in the new light caught by their facets, as the result of some unexpected turn. Radwalader himself went farther. He combined the confidence of the American in his future with that of the Frenchman in his past. Andrew had thought him cynical, but he gained by contrast with his companions. The others seemed merely to be giving thought to what they said, but he to be saying what he thought.

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"I'm almost remorseful at having asked you to join us this afternoon," he began, when the introductions were over. "Whenever I see a man in a strange crowd, it reminds me of society's phrase at parting—'I've enjoyed *myself* immensely!' It has the distinction of being the only polite remark which has any claim upon veracity. Usually, one hasn't enjoyed anything else! Of course, for the moment, you feel like a brook-trout in salt water. But it's a crowd that I think you'll like, when the grossly overestimated element of novelty wears off. Let me tell you, in a word, who they are, and what they stand for. That's De Boussac at the piano. He knows four major and two minor chords in every key of the gamut, and contrives to fashion, out of the six, an accompaniment for anything you may ask of him. Beside him, leaning over the music, is Lister. He's a would-be playwright, with a mother who has gained the nickname of the 'Jail-breaker,' because she never finishes a sentence. You'll meet her some day and be amused. To the left is Rafferty—who's popular because, just now, brogue happens to rhyme with vogue. Then, Clavercil. He thinks he's not understood, without realizing that his sole ground for dissatisfaction lies in the fact that he is. He's a fool, pure and simple, who inherited a fortune from his uncle—a bully old chap who never made a mistake in his life, and only the one I have mentioned, in his death. Next, Wisby—who paints things as they are not, and will be famous when the public gets educated down to him. The man helping himself to whiskey is Berrith. He wrote 'The Foibles of Fate' in the early '90's, and has been living ever since on the dregs of its success—a 'one-book author' with a vengeance. That's Ford, by the window, with the red hair. He's a crank on aerial navigation, and says his airship will be the solution of the problem. I've already christened it 'Eve,' with an eye to its share in another fall of man."

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Radwalader lowered his voice.

"On your right is Barclay-Jones. Barclay was his mother's name, and when he came abroad he hyphenated it with his father's. The combination always reminds me of a rather stylish tug-boat with its towline attached to a scow on a mud-flat. The man listening to him is Gerald Kennedy, the singer. He hasn't advanced beyond the Tommy Tucker stage yet, but he's a good sort, an Englishman, a friend of Mrs. Carnby and of the Ratchetts. On my left are Norrich, Peake, and Pfeffer, in the order named. Pfeffer is the only married man in the crowd. He married in haste, and his leisure is employed to the full. He gets his pin-money from his wife, and a prick of the pin goes with every franc. Norrich is on the staff of the Paris *Herald*. Peake, like Clavercil, is simply the disbursing agent of an inherited fortune."

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Radwalader paused, lighted a cigarette, and smiled at Andrew frankly.

"*Finis!*" he said. "Do you think me very uncharitable? I hope not. It seems so much better to get men's bad qualities out of the way and done with at the start, and then to find out their good points, one by one, in a succession of pleasant surprises. It's a crowd you'll like, when once you get the point of view. You've been used to poise, and at first you won't like pose. But, after all, the difference lies only in the eye—a pun's only permissible when it tells the truth. We all pose over here. You will, yourself, if you stay long enough. It's as contagious as smallpox. And, by the way, I

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was talking with Peake about you only yesterday. He's going to the States next week, and wants to find some one to occupy his apartment while he's away. If you're not thinking of remaining at the Ritz, you couldn't do better than to take it. It's a charming little place, on the Rue Boissière, near the Place d'Iéna, perfectly furnished, and with a balcony and bath. Of course, the rent's no object to him. All he wants is some one to keep it aired and clean."

"It can't do any harm to ask him about it," said Andrew. "To tell you the truth, I've rather been thinking of doing something of the kind."

"No sooner said than done," agreed Radwalader, and, leaning forward across Norrich, he added: "I say, Peake, move up here, will you?"

"I've been telling Vane about your apartment," he continued, as Peake drew close to them, dragging his chair by the arms, "and he seems to think he might like to have a look at it. He's over here for quite a time, you know, and he certainly couldn't be as comfortable anywhere else."

"I hope you'll take the place, Mr. Vane," said Peake. "I've always maintained that a man of my tastes had no business in the States; but it seems I have, after all. I think I told you, Radwalader—my late, lamented Aunt Esther, you know. She threatened to leave me nothin' but her good will, and now she's popped off, saddlin' me with everythin' she had in the world."

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"That's what she meant by her good will, probably," observed Radwalader.

"P'r'aps," said Peake, with a little nod. "But the c'lamity's just as great. She was a good-hearted creature, but she belonged to the black-walnut and marble-group period. Her sideboard weighed a ton, and she had wax flowers in her 'parlour.' And I'm to sell *nothin'*, my good man! It's all to go to my wife! Why, the very thought's enough to keep any woman from marryin' me. Oh, my dear Radwalader, I mourn my find, I do indeed."

"But about the apartment?" suggested Radwalader.

"Oh! Well, all I can say, Mr. Vane, is that I'm sure you'll be comfortable. It's a modest box, at best; but it suits me, and will probably suit you. 'Man wants but little here below'—a bath, sunlight, a good bed, and cleanliness—that's all. You'll find 'em at my place. Radwalader'll get you a *valet de chambre*, no doubt. I'd throw mine in, if I hadn't already thrown him out. The wife of my *concierge* is doin' for me till I go. I can't say more. Two hundred francs a month. I'll be back by the first of August—I can't miss Trouville, you know, Radwalader—and the chances are I'll have to evict you, Mr. Vane. I know *I* wouldn't leave that apartment except at the business end of a pitch-fork!"

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"It sounds like the very thing I want," said Andrew, with a smile at the other's eloquence.

"And there's actually some prospect of your getting it," drawled Radwalader. "What an exceptional animal you are, Vane!"

"Come 'round to-morrow mornin' to breakfast, both of you," said Peake. "Then you can have a look over the place, Mr. Vane, and judge for yourself. If you like it, we'll clinch a bargain on the spot."

"Very well," agreed Andrew. "Shall I stop for you, Mr. Radwalader?"

"By all means. About twelve."

"Then *that's* settled!" observed Peake, with an air of profound satisfaction. "I positively must have a whiskey, Radwalader. I'm quite exhausted. I haven't talked so much business in a year."

For an hour the conversation was general, and presently thereafter Radwalader was alone. For a time he stood by the *salon* table, idly fingering a paper-cutter and scowling. Then he stepped noiselessly to the door, listened briefly but intently, and abruptly flung it open and looked out into the *antichambre*.

"Not this time!" observed Jules laconically, from the dining-room beyond, where he was languidly polishing wine-glasses.

"I'm glad to see you profit by experience," retorted Radwalader. "Come here."

The faithful servitor came slowly across the hallway, glanced about the empty *salon*, helped himself liberally from the whiskey decanter, swallowed the raw spirit at a gulp, and flung himself heavily into a chair.

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"Fire away!" he remarked. "I hope it's something worth while. I don't mind saying I'm hard up."

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### A REVOLT SUPPRESSED.

"I've passed the window every day for a week," continued Monsieur Jules Vicot, "because I hardly thought you were in earnest in your threat to throw me over, and when I saw the jar there again, this morning, I found I was quite right. You'd thought better of it—eh? You wanted to see me. It's just as well, perhaps—for both of us."

There was a suggestion of defiance in his tone which contrasted curiously with the tremor of his hand, as he lit a cigarette.

"I might have taken the liberty of calling on one of your Thursdays, without any summons," he added, as Radwalader made no reply. As he spoke, he glanced up, met the other's steady eyes, and immediately looked away again.

"It doesn't do to push a partner too far," he concluded, with the hint of a whine.

There was a long pause, which was evidently extremely disconcerting to Monsieur Vicot. He removed his cigarette from his lips several times, and as often replaced it, his hand trembling violently. Radwalader never took his eyes from him, but sat, smiling slightly, with his elbow resting on the arm of his chair, and his hand raised and open. There was not a quiver in his fingers, a fact which was duly noted, as it was intended to be, by his companion.

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"Have you lost your tongue?" demanded the latter presently, with manifest irritation.

"Oh, by no means, my excellent Jules," answered Radwalader, easily. "I was simply reflecting how I might submit a few facts for your consideration in a manner which would render a repetition of the communication unnecessary. There seems to be some misunderstanding. I think I'm not slow to appreciate another's meaning. I make bold to suppose that you desire to intimidate me?"

Monsieur Vicot fidgeted uneasily, discarded his cigarette, lit another, shrugged his shoulders, and gripped the arms of his chair.

"I think it's time we understood each other," resumed Radwalader, still smiling. "It's long since we spoke of certain things—trivialities, maybe, such as forgery, theft, and blackmail—"

"As to blackmail—" put in the other, with an attempt at bravado.

"Exactly," agreed Radwalader. "You're about to say that we're in the same boat. So we are, but not—to quote the old epigram—but not with the same skulls. I'm not a fool, my good Jules. You are. I walk in the bed of running streams, you in fresh-fallen snow. The inference is plain. My hold upon you is in black and white, and deposited, as you know, in my safe-deposit vault at the bank. It's as comforting as an insurance policy. In case of my sudden disappearance—"

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"Oh, chuck it!" said Vicot.

"Whereas your hold upon me," swerved off Radwalader pleasantly, "also as you know, is as substantial as the cigarette-ash you've just flicked upon my carpet."

"Chuck that, too," put in Vicot, sullenly. "What's the use of all this talk? You've the whip-hand, Radwalader, and you know it."

"*Then remember it, by God!*" exclaimed the other. His assumption of smiling pleasantly was gone like a wisp of smoke. He had risen suddenly, and, with his fist clenched on the table-edge, was leaning over his companion as if he would crush him by the very force of his personality. His steel-blue eyes had hardened, and at the corners of his lips hovered a sneering smirk which suggested a panther.

"Then remember it," he reiterated, "and remember it for all time! What I say, I say once. After that—I act. You snivelling drunkard! You wretched, nerve-racked lump of bluff! *You threaten me?* Did you suppose I'd forgotten that I could have sent you to the galleys five years ago, just because I haven't mentioned the fact since then? Do you imagine I can't send you there now? Do you think I'd hesitate for a wink about throwing you overboard, body and soul, if I didn't find you useful? Do you fancy I'm *afraid* of you? God! What a maggot it is! Look at those hands, you whelp! I've seen you grovel, and I've heard you whine, and what a man will do once he'll do again under like conditions. It's too late for you to pit your will against mine, my friend! You gave yourself away five years ago, when first I put on the thumbscrews, and I know at just which turn of them you're going to whimper again!"

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To all appearance, the white heat of Radwalader's passion was gone as suddenly as it had come. With the last words, his face resumed its normal expression of placidity, and, before he continued, he began to pace slowly up and down the room, with his thumbs in the pockets of his trousers. Vicot had made no motion, save, at the other's contemptuous reference to his hands, to fold his arms. Now he sank a little farther into his chair, and, under lowered lids, his eyes slid to and fro, following his companion's march.

"If you didn't understand the situation before," resumed Radwalader, "it's probable that you do now. As it happens, I don't fear God, man, or devil; but even if I were as timid as a rabbit, I wouldn't fear *you!* You're a convenience, that's all—an instrument to do that part of my work which is a trifle too dirty for a gentleman's hands. So long as you do it to my satisfaction, I see fit to pay you, and pay you well; and you're free to drink like the swine you are, and go to the devil your own way. But the indispensable man doesn't exist, my good Jules, and the moment you kick over the traces, out you go! I discarded you last month because I don't like people who listen at doors, even if I'm not fool enough to give them an opportunity of hearing anything. If I've chosen to call for you again, it's simply that I've work for you, and assuredly not because I'm in any fear of consequences. Pray get that into your head as speedily, and keep it there as long, as possible. There are plenty of others to take your place. As for partners, you're as much mine as the coyote is the wolf's, and no more. So you've said enough on *that* point."

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"What's the job?" put in Vicot, as the other paused.

"If you haven't forgotten certain things in the past few weeks, you know what it means when I sit close to one man and talk only to him whenever you're in the room."

"Never to forget his face," answered Vicot, as if responding to a question in the catechism. "Is it another game of shadow?"

"To an extent, yes. But it will be more in the open than usual. You won't have to skulk. Do you think you can accustom yourself to the change?"

"Get on!" said Vicot impatiently. "I suppose it's the young chap?"

"Yes. He's to take Remson Peake's apartment, in all probability—or some other. And you, my excellent Jules, are to be his *valet de chambre*."

"Humph!" commented the other, without any evidence of surprise. "And the pay?"

"What's usual from him, I suppose," said Radwalader, "and from me double."

"Say three hundred francs a month, all told?"

"About that."

Radwalader seated himself again, and, leaning forward, continued more earnestly, making a little church and steeple of his linked fingers.

"First, visitors—their names, or, if not that, their appearance, as accurately as possible. Next, letters—both incoming and outgoing—particularly the latter. Steam them, and take copies whenever it seems best. Keep an eye especially on anything relating to—well, to women in general. If any come to the apartment, make good use of your remarkable faculty for eavesdropping, which was so lamentably misapplied here. Keep your hands off his tobacco and wine. Be respectful. Get him to talk as much as possible, and remember what he says. Stay sober—if you can. And report to me immediately if anything important turns up."

"When do I begin?"

"I can't tell. In a few days, probably. I'll let you know."

Vicot rose slowly.

"What a blackguard you are, Radwalader!" he said, almost admiringly.

"That's not the greatest compliment I've known you to pay me," drawled Radwalader. "Imitation is the sincerest flattery."

The other poured himself another half-glass of whiskey, set it on the table-edge, and stood looking down at it. [112]

"And I was once a gentleman!" he said.

"Oh, don't get maudlin," answered Radwalader. "We were all of us something unprofitable once. The main fact, by your own confession, is that, as a gentleman, you couldn't make enough to keep body and soul together; and that, as a scalawag, you can turn over three hundred francs a month. The world is full of gentlemen. They're a drug on the market. But accomplished scoundrels are rare, my good Vicot."

"You'll have a deal to answer for one of these days, Radwalader."

Radwalader shrugged his shoulders.

"One never has to answer so long as there are no questions asked," he said flippantly. "You'd better take your tippie and go home. Preaching doesn't become you in the least degree."

"I want to know," said Vicot slowly, taking up his glass, "what you mean to do. I've pulled many a chestnut out of the fire for you, Radwalader, and if I haven't burned my fingers in doing it, I've soiled them enough, God knows. You haven't any scruple about calling me names, and I take your insults because I'd starve to death if I didn't. But I've a conscience, and it cuts me, now and again."

"Bank-notes make good court-plaster," observed Radwalader.

"Yes, but there are some things which I've done that I won't do again. I don't want to be mixed up in another affair like that of young Baxter. Do you ever think of that morning at the Morgue?" [113]

"I wasn't made to look backward," said Radwalader. "Providence put my eyes in the front of my head, and I know how to take a hint."

"Well, I think of it—often," said Vicot, with something like a shudder. "He repaid me in my own coin, that boy. If I shadowed him in his life, he shadows me in his death. Even brandy doesn't blot him out of my mind. When I shut my eyes at night, I can see him, sitting in that ghastly chair, with his face, all purple, looking through the cloudy glass—as truly murdered by us who stood looking at him, as if we had pitched him into the lake at Auteuil with our own hands!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Radwalader. "You know what that means, don't you? Other men see centipedes and blue rats: you see Baxter, that's all. Cut off the liquor, and you won't know there ever was such a thing as a Morgue. Baxter was a silly ass. He tried to do things with ten thousand francs that a sane man wouldn't attempt with a hundred. I let him go his pace, and I was as surprised as the next chap when I found how short his rope was. I held his notes for double the amount he had in the beginning. Did I come down on his family for them, after he chose the easiest way of evading payment? Not a bit of it. I burned them."

"Policy," commented Vicot briefly.

"Is the best honesty," supplemented Radwalader.

"He was daft on baccarat, and if he had to lose, why not to me as well as another? And a man who drowns himself for ten thousand francs isn't worth considering." [114]

He crossed to the piano, and, seating himself, let his fingers stray up and down the keyboard through a maze of curiously intermingling minor chords. Then he began to hum softly, looking up, with his eyes half-closed, as if trying to recall the words. After a moment, he struck a final note, low in the bass, and, with his foot on the pedal, listened until the sound died down to silence.

"I want to know what you mean to do," reiterated Vicot obstinately.

"Well, you won't, and that's flat. The job is for you to take or leave, as you see fit. Only I want yes or no, and, after that, no more talk. I'm a hard man to make angry, but you've done it once today, and that's once too often for your good. Why, what are you thinking of, man? You've known me for five years. Did you ever see me hesitate or back down? Did you ever find a screw loose in my work, or so much as a scrap of paper to incriminate me? Did you ever know me to leave a footprint in the mud we've been through together—or let you leave one either, for that matter? A man like you would land in Mazas inside of a week, if he tinkered with business like mine,

without a head like mine to guide him! Look here. You've been useful to me, Vicot, and, though you've been paid enough to make us quits, I'm not ungrateful to you in my own way. Continue to stick by me and I'll stick by you. Throw it all over, if you will, and you can go your way, with a handsome present to boot. But let me hear any more of such drivel as you've given me to-day, and, as God lives, my man, I'll smooch you off the face of the earth, as I'd smooch a green caterpillar off a page of my book! You'd be a smear of slime, my friend, and nothing more—and I'd turn the page, and go on reading!"

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Radwalader had not raised his tone, as on the former occasion, or even risen, but his voice rasped the silence of the *salon* like a diamond on thin glass.

"Is it yes, or no?" he added.

Vicot swallowed the spirit in his glass, and looked across at him with his eyes watering and blinking.

"You know which," he said.

"Say it!"

"It's yes," said Vicot sulkily; "but if I wasn't the cur I am, I'd tell you to go to hell—you and all your works!"

Radwalader closed the piano gently.

"If it affords you any satisfaction to hear it," he answered, rising with a yawn, "I think it likely that the injunction is entirely superfluous. We sha'n't gain anything by prolonging this interview. It's four minutes to six, and I must dress for dinner. When I want you, I'll stick the blue jar in the window. Meanwhile, here's fifty francs on account. I'll get Mr. Vane to pay you in advance."

Vicot stood silent for a moment, the bill crackling as he folded it between his trembling fingers.

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"Is that his name?" he asked.

"That's his name. *Au revoir*."

And Radwalader went to the window, flung it open, and drew a deep breath of the soft, spring-evening air. A girl was selling violets on the corner, and he beckoned to her, and bought a bunch of Palmas, leaning down from the sill to take them. Plunging his face into the fragrant purple mass, he dropped a two-franc piece into her hand with a gesture which bade her keep the coin.

"*Comme monsieur est bon!*" said the girl, smiling up at him.

Only one other figure was in sight, that of Monsieur Jules Vicot, with his head bent, and his hands in his pockets, turning, at a snail's pace, into the Avenue Victor Hugo. From him Radwalader's eyes came back to the face of the flower-girl.

"You were just in time," he said, with his nose among the violets. "The air was getting a little close."

Then he shut the window, leaving her looking up, smiling, and wrinkling her forehead at the same time, and went back into his bedroom, whistling "*Au Clair de la Lune*."

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## CHAPTER VII.

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### A PLEDGE OF FRIENDSHIP.

The following week found Andrew fairly installed *en garçon*, with a man-servant, recommended by Radwalader, presiding over his boots and apparel, and a fat apple-cheeked *concierge* preparing his favourite dishes in a fashion which suggested that all former cooks of his experience had been the veriest tyros. It had taken but a week at the Ritz to disgust him with the elaborate pomposity of life at a fashionable hotel, and, in its unpretentious way, Remson Peake's apartment was a gem. A tiled bath, with a porcelain tub; a bedchamber in white and sage-green, with charmingly odd, splay-footed furniture of the Glasgow school; a severely simple dining-room, with curtains and upholstery of heavy crimson damask; a study with furniture of *marqueterie* mahogany, a huge divan, and a club-fender upon which to cock one's feet; a pantry and a kitchen like a doll's—it was complete, inviting, and equipped in every detail. For Andrew it had a very special charm. His whole life had been, to a great extent, subordinate to the presence and personality of his grandfather. Even college had not brought him the usual accompaniment of rooms at Claverly or Beck, for—and it was to his credit—he had never so much as suggested leaving Mr. Sterling alone in the big house on Beacon Hill. But even an influence as kindly as this gentle, indulgent old man's may irk. Now, for the first time, Andrew found himself the practical master of his movements. And Remson Peake's apartment had the rare, almost unique, quality of disarming criticism. One had no suggestions to make. One would—given the opportunity—have done the same in every particular.

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And so, the faint qualms of homesickness having worn off in the course of his initial fortnight in the capital, Andrew found himself supremely contented, and discovered a new charm in life at every turn. Radwalader was the essence of courtesy and consideration, invariable in his good humour, tireless in his efforts to amuse and entertain the young *protégé* of his good friend Mrs. Carnby. Paris, he told Andrew, was like a box of delicate *pastilles*, each of which should be allowed to melt slowly on the tongue: it disagreed with those who attempted to swallow the whole box of its attractions at a gulp. So they went about Andrew's sight-seeing in a leisurely manner, taking the Louvre and the Luxembourg by half-hours, and sandwiching in a church, a monument, or a celebrated street, on the way; for it was another theory of Radwalader's that a

franc found on the pavement, or in the pocket of a discarded waistcoat, is more gratifying than fifty deliberately earned.

"It's the things you happen on which you will enjoy," he said, "not those you go to work to find, by taking a tram or walking a mile. Unpremeditated discoveries, like unpremeditated dissipations, are always the most successful. There's nothing so flat as a plan."

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As was to be expected, Mrs. Carnby was not able to monopolize Andrew. Mrs. Ratchett took him into her good graces, and, as was usual with her where men were concerned, contrived to make him think of her between his calls. And there were many others—women characteristic of the American Colony, whose husbands were never served up except with dinner. It was as Mrs. Carnby told him:

"If a bachelor has manners, discretion, and presentable evening dress, he need never pay for a dinner in Paris, so long as the Colony knows of his existence. And remember this. Nothing is dearer to a woman's heart than a man at five o'clock. She will excuse anything, if you'll give her a chance to remember how many lumps you take and whether it's cream or lemon. Attend to your teas, my young friend, and you can do just about as you like about your *p*'s and *q*'s!"

Madame Palffy, too, seeking whom she might entertain (which, in her case, was equivalent to devouring), collected young men as geologists collect specimens of minerals. The analogy was strengthened by her predilection for chipping off portions—the darker portions—of their characters, and handing these around for the edification of her friends. She cultivated Andrew assiduously, though it was not for this reason that he dropped in so frequently at tea-time. Margery, with her clean-cut beauty, appealed to him in a very special sense. They had in common many memories of the free, open-air, sane, and wind-blown life of the North Shore; and now, when they idled through portions of "The Persian Garden," which had been the fad at Beverly, it was by way of getting a whiff of sea air, and an echo of the laughter that had been.

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Often he found himself looking at her admiringly. She had the knack of satisfying one's sense of what ought to be. Her dress was almost always of a studied simplicity which depended for its effect entirely upon colour and fit, and could have been bettered in neither. Not the least factor in her striking beauty was its purity, its freedom from the smallest suggestion of artificiality. She was singularly alive, admirably clear-eyed and strong, and in her fresh propriety there was always a challenge to the open air and the full light of day. She had, even in the ballroom, an indefinable hint of out-of-doors. The contrast between her personality and that of Parisian women—of Mirabelle Tremonceau, for example—was the contrast between the clean, dull linen of a New England housekeeper and the dainty shams of an exhibition bedroom; between a physician's hands and a manicure's; between the keen, salt air of the North Shore and that of a tropical island. Her femininity impressed where that of others merely charmed. The majority of women are pink: Margery Palffy was a soft, clear cream.

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Nevertheless, Andrew seemed to feel, rather than to see, a subtle alteration in her. A few months had given her a new reserve, almost an attitude of distrust, which puzzled and eluded him. Their talks at Beverly had been different from these. There, they had spoken much of the future, of what they hoped and believed: here they skirted, instead of boldly boarding, serious topics, and were fallen unconsciously, but immediately, into the habit of chaffing each other over meaningless trifles. He was baffled and disconcerted by the change. There was much which he had come to say. He had rehearsed it all many times, and remembering the charming lack of constraint which had characterized all their former intercourse, to say it had seemed comparatively easy. But now he was like a man who has been recalling his fluent renderings, at school or college, of the classic texts, but, suddenly confronted with the same passages, cannot translate a word.

Again, the presence of her family depressed him with something of her own visible distress, humiliated him with something of her own evident shame. There was no such thing as making allowances for either Monsieur or Madame Palffy. From the moment of one's first glimpse of them, they were hopelessly and irretrievably impossible. Not that they had the faintest suspicion of this. They were supremely self-satisfied, and moved massively through life with a firm conviction that they fulfilled all requirements. Madame, with her frightful French, was as complacent in a conversation with a duchess of the Faubourg as was Monsieur, with his feeble and flatulent observations upon subjects of which he had no knowledge, in a company of after-dinner smokers. It was impossible to exaggerate their preternatural idiocy. A bale of cotton, suddenly introduced into polite society, could have manifested no more stupendous lack of resource than they. It was only when tempted with the bait of gossip—most probably untrue—that they rose heavily to the surface of the conversation instead of floundering in its depths. Half the Colony detested them, all of the Colony laughed at them, and none of the Colony believed them. In short—they were Monsieur and Madame Palffy. There was no more to be said.

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Had Margery been farther from him, curiously enough she would have been far more readily approached in the manner which Andrew had planned. He was far from comprehending that it was her vital and intimate interest in him which showed her that he would note all the defects of the deplorable frame wherein he thus found her placed. The very fact that they had known each other under different and happier conditions forced her to assume the defensive now that other circumstances were patent to his eyes. She was intensely proud. There must be no chance for him to pity her. So, she assumed a gaiety which she was far from feeling, and sought in the by-ways of banter a refuge from the broader and more open road of surrender. On her side and on his it was a more mature case of the painful embarrassment incidental to the early stages of a children's party. They had played unrestrainedly together, as it were, but now, in the artificial light of a society strange to both of them, were stricken dumb.

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From the strain of this baffling position Andrew sought relief in the company of Mirabelle



Tremonceau. Here was no constraint, no unuttered solemnities to come up choking into the throat. She was very beautiful, very inconsequent, very gay; but the same light *insouciance* which in Margery distressed and humiliated him, because of the unsounded deeps which lay below, attracted and amused him in Mirabelle, by simple reason of its essential shallowness. She was altogether different from any woman he had ever known, but her novelty meant no more to him than a part of that charmingly sparkling and intoxicating wine of Paris of which he was learning to take deep draughts. Never for an instant did it alter the strength of the original purpose which had brought him from America, but it went far toward lessening the keen disappointment which Margery's apparent disregard of that purpose caused him. In the latter's presence he was exquisitely sensitive to the possible significance of every word. He thought too much, and the sombre current of these reflections too often darkened the surface of conversation, turned her uneasy and unnatural, and sent him away in a fit of the blues. With Mirabelle, on the contrary, he never thought at all. Since he had nothing to ask of her beyond what she had already granted him—the privilege of her friendship and the fascination of her presence—he enjoyed these to the full. It was his consuming desire for another and more tender relation with Margery that caused him to be blind to the promise of that which existed—almost to despise it.

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Minutes grew into hours with unbelievable celerity in the company of Mirabelle Tremonceau. With something akin to intuition, all unsuspecting as he was, he said nothing of her to Mrs. Carnby, to Margery, or even to Radwalader. At the first, there was but one who could have told him whither he was tending—but Thomas Radwalader had all-sufficient reasons for holding his tongue. Yet, back of his slight infatuation, there lay in Andrew's mind a little sense of guilt. He could not have laid finger upon the quality of his indiscretion, but he felt indefinitely that all was not right. He recognized, or seemed to recognize, in Mirabelle a fruit forbidden, but told himself that it was a passing episode. He was confident that the way would yet lie open for the attainment of his heart's desire, and meanwhile he would amuse himself and say nothing. Your ostrich, with his silly head buried in the sand, is not the only creature that fatuously underestimates both its own desirability and the perspicacity of those interested in its movements. Twice, in the afternoon, Andrew had driven with Mirabelle in the Allée des Acacias. She gave him the seat at her right, and people turned to look at the passing victoria, as they had turned and looked on the afternoon when she took his arm at the gate of Auteuil.

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But better than driving was the time passed, daily, in her apartment on the Avenue Henri Martin. It was on the fifth floor, running the whole width of the house, and with a broad balcony looking down upon the rows of trees below. A corner of this balcony was enclosed by gay awnings, and made garden-like by azaleas and potted palms. Mademoiselle Tremonceau had a great lounging chair, and a table for books and *bon-bons*, and Andrew sprawled at her feet, on red cushions, with his back against the balcony rail, his hands linked behind his head, and his long legs stretched out upon a Persian rug. All this was the most unexpected feature of his new life, and hence the most attractive. It was as far as possible removed from a suggestion of metropolitan existence. May was already upon them, and the air above the wide and shaded avenue was indescribably soft and sweet. The roar of the city mounted to their high coign only in a subdued murmur, as of the sea at a distance. Birds came and went, twittering on the cornice above their heads. The sun soaked through Andrew's serge and linen, and sent pleasurable little thrills of warmth through the muscles of his broad back. A faint perfume came to him from the roses on the table. A delicious, indefinable languor hung upon his surroundings. He was vaguely reminded of afternoons at Newport and Nahant—afternoons when everything smelt of new white flannel, warm leaves, and the fox-terrier blinking and quivering on his knee—when the only sounds were the whine of insects in the vines, the rasping snore of locusts in the nearest trees, and the snarl of passing carriage-wheels on a Macadam driveway. He could close his eyes and remember it all, and know that what had been, was good. He could open them, and feel that what was, was better!

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As is always the case, when sympathy is pregnant with prophecy, Andrew's acquaintance with Mirabelle Tremonceau had grown into friendship before he realized the change. At first he had made excuses for the frequency of his calls; but at the end of three weeks the daily visit had come, in his eyes as well as hers, to be a matter of course.

So it was that three o'clock would find him upon her balcony, or in a cushioned corner of her divan; and whereas, at the outset, he had been but one of several men present, he discovered of a sudden not only that for four days had he found her alone at the accustomed hour, but that she refused herself to other callers when the *maître d'hôtel* brought in their cards. He was not insensible to the compliment, but it was one he had experienced before.

That afternoon, the *maître d'hôtel* had not even taken his name, but ushered him directly through the *salon* to the Venetian blind at the window, and lifted this to let him pass out upon the balcony. Mademoiselle Tremonceau was in her great chair, with a yellow-covered novel perched, tent-like, upon her knee. She smiled as he came out, and gave him her hand. Andrew bent over and kissed it, before taking his seat. It was a trick of the Frenchmen he had met at Mrs. Carnby's—one of the things which are courtesies in Paris, and impertinence elsewhere. The girl's hand lay for an instant against his lips. It was as soft as satin, and smelt faintly of orris, and her fingers closed on his with a little friendly pressure.

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"You were expecting me?" he asked, as he dropped upon the cushions beside her.

"I'd given you up," she answered. "It's ten minutes past three."

"Am I as regular as that?" he laughed. "I was lunching at my friend Mrs. Carnby's, and we didn't get up from table till long after two. I came directly over."

Mirabelle looked away across the house-tops with a little frown.

"What is it?" asked Andrew. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Oh no! My thoughts wouldn't be a bargain at a penny. Tell me—have you seen Mr. Radwalader lately?"

"Last night. We went to the Français."

"You continue to like him?"

"I think we should never be intimate friends. Apart from the difference in our ages and opinions, there's something about him which I don't seem to get at—like shaking a gloved hand, if you know what I mean."

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"Ye-es," said Mirabelle slowly. "It's odd you should have noticed that."

"But it's ungrateful of me to mention even that small objection," continued Andrew. "He's been the soul of kindness, and has shown me all over Paris, introduced me everywhere, and, in general, explained things. I've learned more in three weeks with him than I could have learned myself in a year. So, you see, I couldn't very well help liking him, even if I wanted to help it—which I don't. Why do you ask?"

For an instant Mirabelle's slender hand fluttered toward him with an odd little tentative gesture, and then went back to her cheek.

"I'm not sure," she answered. "Perhaps only for lack of anything else to say. People have told me that they disliked Mr. Radwalader—that they distrusted him."

"I suppose we're all of us disliked and distrusted—by somebody," said Andrew. "But, so far as I'm concerned, Radwalader's my friend. Perhaps you don't know me well enough yet to understand that that means a great deal."

"You're very loyal you mean?" suggested the girl.

"I hope so—yes. I have few friends; but those I have, I care for and respect and, if necessary, defend. They can't be talked against in my presence."

"I wonder," said Mirabelle slowly, "if I'm one of the happy few."

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"Decidedly!" said Andrew heartily.

"Do you mean," she continued, "that you care for me as you care for these other friends, that you—that you respect me, and that you'd defend me—if necessary?"

"Decidedly, decidedly! I hope I've proved the first two, and I hope there'll never be any cause to prove the last. But if there is, you may count on me."

Mirabelle looked at him for a moment, and then leaned back and closed her eyes.

"Thank you," she said. "You don't know what that means to me."

"Why, how serious you are over it!" laughed Andrew. "Does it seem to you so very wonderful? To me it appears to be the most natural thing in the world."

"Ah, to *you*, perhaps," answered Mirabelle. "But to me—yes, it does seem *very* wonderful. You see—I've never had it said to me before!"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

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### A PARLEY AND A PRAYER.

May was close upon the heels of June before there came a change, but one afternoon, as Andrew paused in his playing, an atmosphere of new intimacy seemed to touch him. He had been alone with Margery for half an hour, and something in the music—or was it only fancy?—told him that her thoughts were occupied with him. She had greeted him with a little air of weariness—but not unfriendly—and, as he took her hand, she looked at him with some indefinite question in her eyes. The impression made by this gained on him as they talked, and, more strongly, as he played. Once or twice he was upon the point of turning abruptly and seeking the clue, but he had been so long perplexed, so long uncertain, that he hesitated still. If only she would give him an opening, if she would but come, as she had often come at Beverly, to lean above him, humming the words of some song into which he had unconsciously drifted, then had he had the courage to turn, to grip her hands, to ask her....

"I wonder if we would, even if we could," she said.

"What?" asked Andrew.

"How should you be expected to know? I've been a thousand miles away—thinking of Omar. I mean whether we would 'shatter it to bits, and then remould it nearer to the heart's desire.'"

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Andrew swung round on the piano-stool, slowly chafing his palms together. He did not dare trust himself to look at her. For the first time since they had met in Paris, he caught an echo of the old life in her tone.

"I wonder if we could, even if we would," he answered. "I think so—perhaps. Whatever set you thinking about that?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Margery, with a short laugh. "Sometimes, in my own little way, I'm quite a philosopher! I was just thinking that if any of us were given the chance to change things—everything—shatter 'the sorry scheme of things' into bits, as Omar says—we should perhaps make an equally sorry bungle of the task of reconstruction. We're always saying 'If!' but when it actually came to the point, do you suppose we'd really want anything to be different?"

Again that singular, appealing query in her eyes. It was the old Margery at last, simple, serious, and candid. There was a responsive light in Andrew's face as he replied:

"Some things, no doubt. I don't think I could suggest a desirable change in you—except one. Will you let me tell you?"

Margery nodded.

"It's more of a restoration than a change," continued Andrew. "I'd like to see you, in every respect, precisely as you were at Beverly." [132]

"And am I not? A little older, of course, and bound to be more dignified, as becomes a young woman in society; but for the rest, I'd be sorry to think you find a change in me."

Andrew wheeled back to the piano, and refingered a few chords.

"Now that you've seen the world," he said presently, "tell me what pleases you most in life."

And he faced her again, smiling.

"Motion!" replied Margery promptly. "I can't explain that, but I know it's so. Motion! I don't care what kind, just so long as it shows that the world is alive and happy. I love to see things run and leap—a man, or a horse, or a dog. I love the surf, the trees in a wind; all evidences of strength, of activity, of—well, of *life* in every and any form. Not so much dancing. That always seems to me to be a forced, an artificial kind of movement, unless it's *very* smoothly done—and you know, almost every one hops! But I could watch swimming and driving and rowing for hours, and, for that matter, any outdoor sport—racing, football, lacrosse—anything which gives one the idea that men are glad to be alive!"

"How curious!" said Andrew.

"Curious? Why?"

"Because that's a man's point of view, not a girl's. I ask you what pleases you most in life, and I expect that you're going to say music, or flowers, or the play. Instead, you cut out remorselessly everything which one naturally associates with a woman's way of amusing herself, and give me an answer which sounds as if it came from one of the lads at St. Paul's. That's the way they used to talk, exactly. It was all rush, vim, get-up-and-get-out, with them. If you know what I mean, they breathed so hard and talked so fast that it always seemed to me as if they'd just come in from running in a high wind." [133]

"Yes," agreed Margery, with a nod. "I know. That's what I like. That's what I call the glad-to-be-alive atmosphere."

There fell a little silence. Andrew's fine eyes were tiptoeing from point to point of the big, over-furnished *salon* with a kind of amazed disgust. He had not known that there were so many hideous things in the world. Madame Palfy worshipped at the twin altars of velvet and gilt paint. Much of what now encumbered the room and smote the eye had been picked up in Venice, at the time of her ponderous honeymoon with the apoplectic Palfy. That was twenty years before, when the *calle* back of the Piazza were filled with those incalculable treasures of tapestry, carved wood, and ivory now in the *palazzi* of rich Venetians—if, indeed, they are not in Cluny. But the Palfys were as stupid as they were pompous. They moved heavily round and round the Piazza, and furnished their prospective *salon* out of the front windows of smirking charlatans. The irreparable and damning results of their selection, as Andrew now surveyed them, had been modified—or, more exactly, exaggerated—by the subsequent purchases of two decades in the flamboyant bazars of the Friedrichs Strasse, in the "art departments" of the big shops on Regent and Oxford streets, and in the degenerate galleries of the Palais Royal. Madame Palfy's idea of statuary was a white marble greyhound asleep upon a cushion of red *sarrancolin*: and her taste ran to Bohemian glass, to onyx vases, and to plaques with broad borders of patterned gilt, enclosing heads of simpering Neapolitan girls—these last to hang upon the wall. There were spindle-legged chairs, with backs like golden harps, and seats of brocade wherein salmon-pink and turquoise-blue wrestled for supremacy; and in front of the huge mantel (logically decked with a red lambrequin) there was a velvet ottoman in the form of a mushroom, whereon when Monsieur Palfy sat, his resemblance to a suffocating frog became absolutely startling. The rest of the furniture was so massive as to suggest that it could have been moved to its present position by no agency less puissant than a glacier, and, for the most part, the upholstery was tufted, and so tightly stuffed that one slid about on the chairs and sofas as if they had been varnished. The room contained four times as much of everything as was appropriate or even decent, and this gave all the furnishings the air of being on exhibition and for sale. One's imagination, however, was not apt to embrace the possibility, under any conceivable circumstances, of voluntary purchase. [134]

Presently Andrew's eyes came back to Margery. It was evident that she had been watching him: for she smiled whimsically.

"Well?" she suggested.

"Can you guess what I was thinking?" he asked, with a slightly embarrassed laugh.

"In part, I imagine," said Margery. "Wasn't it something like this: that, as a matter of fact, I *have* pretty well shattered my scheme of things to bits and remoulded it—and that the new arrangement is not altogether a success?"

"I don't seem to see you in these surroundings," returned Andrew evasively. "At Beverly you seemed to 'belong': you were all of a piece with the life. Here—well, it's different. That was why I asked you that question, and that was why I thought there was something about you which I wanted to see changed—or restored. You know we used to be very open with each other, very good friends in every sense of the word; but now something's come between us. I've felt it all along, and I thought perhaps it was that you'd stopped caring for the things that used to mean [135]

most to you, that new interests, and perhaps your success and the compliments that people pay you, had cut the old ties, and that you had new ideas and ideals. I've felt—I've felt, Miss Palffy, that I'd forfeited even the small place I had in your life. You've been holding me at a distance, haven't you? I've thought so. I asked you that question to see if I was right or wrong, and to my surprise I find that you are apparently the same as ever. You still love all that made the sympathy between us. Well, then, the fault must be in me. Tell me: what have I done, that you treat me almost as a stranger?"

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"I'm sorry, very sorry," said Margery earnestly. "If I've given you any such impression, believe me, it was quite without reason or even intention. I've always looked upon you as one of my best friends. Surely, I've not been holding you at a distance: that must have been a fancy of yours. You must know that you're always welcome here, that I'm always glad to see you. Please believe that."

But the little restraint was there!

"I can't quite explain what I mean," said Andrew. "You see, Paris is a queer sort of place. It upsets all one's notions. There's so much that's strange and interesting and new all about us that we're apt to find the old things growing dim. I know, in my own case, that I'm wiser for these few weeks, and perhaps"—he laughed unevenly—"sadder! Forgive me for thinking that it might have been the same with you. This big city is so full of fascinations of one sort or another, that one can hardly be blamed if one is distracted at the first. Until I saw you that Sunday at Mrs. Carnby's, I'd never realized what a difference a few months might make. Your voice brought back—a lot! I forgot that it was all in the past, that we couldn't pick up things as they were in Beverly—the sailing, the bathing, the horseback rides, the golf, and all the rest. Those months had made you a woman and me a man. Much that we used to do and say was done and said and finished with forever. But I *did* hope that the spirit of the thing would remain, that we'd 'grown parallel to each other,' as Mrs. Carnby says, and that we'd be nearer together, instead of farther apart, for the separation. But no! It isn't a fancy on my part. There's something changed. Do you remember Wordsworth? 'There hath passed away a glory from the earth'—and, Miss Palffy, there *has*, there *has*! I know I'm not wrong—something's come between us, and that something is just what I've said—Paris! Isn't it?"

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"Yes!" she answered, with her eyes on his.

But Andrew Vane, the blind, did not understand.

Margery rose, almost with a shudder, crossed the room, and stood at the window opening upon the balcony. Below, a whirling stream of cabs, bound in from Longchamp, split around the island in the centre of the *place*, merged again upon the opposite side, and went rocking and rattling on, up the Avenue Victor Hugo, toward the Arc. In curious contrast to this continuous and flippant clatter, the harsh bell of St. Honoré d'Eylau was striking six.

"I hate it!" said the girl. "I couldn't attempt to make you understand how I loathe Paris, and how home-sick for America I am. Here—I can't express it, but the shallowness and the insincerity and the—the immorality of these people gets into one's blood. It's all pretence, sham, and heartless, cynical impurity. At first I didn't see it—I didn't understand. I was dazzled with the lights, and the fountains, and the gaiety. I was lonely—yes: but when I remembered all there was to see and do, remembered that here is the best in art and music and what not, I thought I should be happy. But it's the beauty of a tropical swamp, Mr. Vane—there's poison in the air! You wouldn't think I'd feel that, would you?—but I do. It's all around me. I can't shut it out. I meet it here, there—everywhere. It sickens me. It chokes me. It's just as if something that I couldn't fight against, that was bound to conquer me in the end, struggle as I might, were trying to rob me of all my beliefs, and ideals, and trust in the honour of men and the goodness of women. I hate it! I'd give—oh, what *wouldn't* I give!—to be back in America, on the good, clean North Shore, where things—where things are *straight*!"

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She turned upon him suddenly, her eyes full of a strange trouble that was almost fear.

"Do you see?" she added.

"Yes," said Andrew slowly. "I think I see. That's what I meant; that's how I thought you would feel. I'm sorry. You're right, of course: Paris is no place for a girl—like you."

"It's no place for any one who loves what's clean and decent," said Margery hotly. "It's no place for a *man*! I'm not supposed to know, am I, about such things? And perhaps I don't. I couldn't tell you exactly what I mean, even if I wanted to. But I feel it here." She laid her hand upon her throat. "I feel the danger that I can't describe. It strangles me. I'm afraid. I'm afraid for its influence upon any one for whom—for whom I might care. I'm afraid for myself. It's nothing definite, you see, and that's just where it seems to me to be so dangerous. Do you remember when we were reading Tennyson at Beverly—'The Lotus Eaters'?"

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She paused for an instant, and then, looking away from him again, recited the lines:

"For surely now our household hearths are cold:  
Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange:  
And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.  
Or else the island princes over-bold  
Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings,  
Before them of the ten years' war in Troy,  
And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things,  
Is there confusion in the little isle?  
Let what is broken so remain."

There was something in her voice more eloquent than the music of the words. Andrew came forward a step, as if he would have touched her, but she looked up and met his eyes.

"And you're afraid—?" he began.

"I'm afraid," she answered, "that we've come to a land where it seems always afternoon; and that if we don't take heed, my friend, we may not fight a good fight, we may not keep the faith."

She made an odd little weary gesture.

"Will you play some of the 'Garden' now?" she asked. "I think I should like it. I'm just the least bit blue." [140]

Andrew hesitated, but the words he wanted would not come. He turned back to the piano, fingered the music doubtfully for a moment, and then began to play. There was no need to voice the words. They both knew them well, and they fitted, as, somehow, the verse of Omar has a knack of doing.

"Strange, is it not, that of the myriads who  
Before us passed the Door of Darkness through,  
Not one returns to tell us of the Road  
Which to discover we must travel too."

"I'm glad I know you," he broke in impulsively, with his fingers on the keys. "You're a good friend."

Margery made no reply.

"My grandfather, who's the best old chap in all the world," continued Andrew, playing the following crescendo softly, "is the only other person of whom I can feel that as you make me feel it. He always calls me 'Andy.' I rather like that silly little name. I wonder—"

He swung round, facing her.

"I think we're both of us a trifle homesick, Miss Palffy. I wonder if you'd mind—calling me—that?"

He looked down for a second, and in that second Margery Palffy moistened her lips. When she spoke, it seemed to her that her voice sounded harsh and dry.

"I shall be very glad, if you wish it—Andy."

"Thank you. And I—?"

"If you like—yes. After all, as you say, we're friends—and a little homesick." [141]

"Thank you, Margery."

Andrew resumed his playing, turning a few pages.

"Ah, Love, could you and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp the sorry scheme of things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"

Behind him, the girl, unseen, unheard, was whispering a word for every chord. Once, her hand went out toward the smooth, close-cropped head, bent in eager attention above the score.

"Ah, Love!" said the music.

"Ah, love!" whispered Margery Palffy.

"What a *lot* there is in this!" exclaimed Andrew, crashing into two sharps.

"Yes."

Once more, to Margery, her voice seemed cold and hard.

"The good old days at Beverly—what?" said Andrew.

"Yes."

Andrew dawdled with the *andante*.

"Ah, Moon of my Delight, that knows no wane—"

"I must be going," he said, and rose to take her hand.

"I wonder," he added, retaining it, "if you know that I would give the world to ask you just one question—and be certain of the answer?"

"Not now," said Margery steadily, "not now, please. I have many things to think of. Listen. I'm going down to Poissy—to the Carnbys', to-morrow. I know they mean to ask you over Sunday; and then, my friend, you can ask me—whatever you will. No, please. Good-by." [142]

From the window she watched him stroll across to the little island in the centre of the *place*, there pause to await the coming of the tram, and then, mounting to the *impériale*, light a cigarette. Presently, with hee-hawing of its donkey-horn, the tram swerved into the avenue again.

The girl leaned her cheek against the heavy curtain. The tram dwindled into the distance—toward the Arc—toward the brilliant centre of Paris—toward danger! Then, in a still small voice, she prayed:

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who—who trespass against us. And lead us—lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil...."

## THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

In the sun-spangled stretch of shade under the acacias of the Villa Rossignol four drank coffee and talked of Andrew Vane. Mrs. Carnby had remained in Paris three weeks beyond her usual time; first, because the weather had been no more than bearably warm; and second, because the decorator who was renovating the *salon* of the villa had been somewhat more than bearably slow. The first of June, however, found her at Poissy, and the Villa Rossignol once more prepared to receive and discharge a continually varying stream of guests with the regularity of a self-feeding press.

There was something very admirable about the hospitality of the Villa Rossignol. In the first place, there were fourteen bedrooms; and in the second, a hostess who never made plans for her guests; and in the third, no fixed hour for first breakfast. People came by unexpected trains, and, finding every one out, ordered, as the sex might be, whiskey and cigarettes, or tea and a powder-box, and were served, and, in general, made themselves at home, till Mrs. Carnby returned from driving or canoeing. And seemingly there was always a saddle-horse at liberty in the stable, no matter how many might be riding; and a vacant corner to be found, inside or out, without regard to the number of *tête-à-têtes* already in progress. In a word, Mrs. Carnby knew to perfection how *laisser aller* and whom *laisser venir*—the which, all said and done, appear to be the qualities most admirable in an out-of-town hostess, by very reason, perhaps, of their being the least common.

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So, at all events, thought Mrs. Carnby's three guests as they took their coffee-cups from her and, sipping the first over-hot spoonfuls cautiously, shuffled a few topics of conversation, in an attempt to find one which invited elaboration. They were consumedly comfortable: for breakfast had been served on the stroke of one, with five members of the house-party absent. The remaining three were grateful for a punctuality which was not concerned with the greatest good of the greatest number.

"It was so wise of you not to wait breakfast, Louisa," observed Mrs. Ratchett, and her voice resembled as much as anything the purr of a particularly well-bred kitten. "I was as hollow as a shell an hour ago. By this time I'd infallibly have caved in."

"It's nothing short of imbecile to wait for people who're out in an automobile," replied Mrs. Carnby. "Whenever any one brings a machine down here, and takes some of my guests to ride, I have all the clocks in the house regulated, and order Armand to announce breakfast and dinner on the stroke of the hour. It's only just to the sane people who may happen to be visiting me."

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"In the present instance," put in Radwalader, "it's to be supposed that the others will have sense enough to get breakfast at the spot nearest available to that of the breakdown."

"The breakdown? You take a deal for granted, Radwalader," said Gerald Kennedy, gazing up into the shifting foliage of the acacias.

"I, too, have been *en auto*," answered Radwalader, "and am familiar with the inevitable feature of a run. At this moment Andrew Vane is in his shirt-sleeves and a pitiful perspiration, violently turning a crank and talking under his breath. Or else he's flat on his back, under the car, with only his feet sticking out. Can you believe otherwise, after the evidence of those five vacant chairs?"

"How sensible we are, we four!" smiled Mrs. Ratchett.

"Ours is the conservatism of the lilies of the field," supplemented Radwalader. "We spin not, therefore neither do we toil."

"I fancy Vane is regretting having left his chauffeur to breakfast in the servant's hall," said Kennedy.

"And I, that, if anything, Vane is the better mechanic of the two," said Radwalader. "The boy's aptitude is really quite astounding. He learned that machine in an hour, Pivert tells me, and now knows it better than Pivert himself. He's only renting it by the week, you know, but old Mr. Sterling will be called upon for the purchase-price, if I'm not mistaken, before he's a month older."

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"One might be justified in remarking," said Mrs. Ratchett, "that Andrew Vane is—er—going it—don't you think?—in a fashion little short of precipitous."

"*Wein—Weib—Gesang*," murmured Kennedy, with his eyes in the trees.

"I know he sings," commented Mrs. Carnby, "but I hadn't heard of his drinking."

"Or of his—oh yes I had, too!" Mrs. Ratchett caught herself up abruptly, with a suspicion of a blush. "Some one told me he was fast going to the—er—"

"Cats?" suggested Kennedy amiably.

"Gerald, you're indecent!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnby. "And remember, I won't listen to gossip about my guests—except Madame Palffy. For the moment, Mr. Vane's reputation is under the protection of mine."

Radwalader leaned back in his chair, and yawned without shame.

"Vane is developing, that's all," he said. "It's a thing rather to be desired than otherwise. Paris does such a deal for the raw American, in the way of opening his eyes. Vane is just beginning to 'learn how.' I've no doubt that in Boston he ate his lettuce with sugar and vinegar, and thought it effeminate to have his nails manicured. Now that he's acquiring the art of living, pray make some allowance for the crude colouring of his *exquisses*. The finished picture will be a creation of marked merit, I warrant you. I've seen a good bit of Vane, and he can be trusted to take care of

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himself."

"The question is whether he can be trusted to have other people take care of him," said Mrs. Ratchett viciously, looking at Radwalader over the edge of her coffee-cup.

"I don't think you dangerous, dear lady."

"Radwalader is always so unselfish," said Mrs. Carnby. "He escapes embarrassing situations by walking out on other people's heads."

"I deserved it," laughed Mrs. Ratchett. "But I really wasn't thinking of you, Radwalader. I heard there was a lady in the case of Mr. Vane."

"I credit him with more originality," said Radwalader. "No, believe me, the facts are no more than must be expected in a young man who has been tied to apron-strings for an appreciable number of years."

"Not that old Mr. Sterling wears aprons," observed Mrs. Carnby.

"And not that I was referring to old Mr. Sterling. I had in mind the very estimable United States of America, which wash so much dirty linen in public that it would be something more than surprising if there were not a supply of particularly starchy apron-strings continually on hand—in Boston in particular. Vane has been taught her creed, which is to make a necessity of virtue. His daily fare has been a *rechauffé* of worn-out fallacies. I haven't a doubt but what he's been instructed that an honest man is the noblest work of God, and I've no idea that he's ever understood till now that vice is its own reward, or how immaterial it is whether a thing is gold or not, so long as it really glitters."

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He turned a tiny glass of *fine* into his coffee, and continued, stirring it thoughtfully:

"What happens when you turn your stable-bred colt out to pasture for the first time? Doesn't he kick up his heels and snort? Assuredly. And we don't take that as an evidence, do we, that, all in good time, he won't run neck and neck with the best of them, and perhaps carry off the Grand Prix? I always believe in cultivating charity, if only for one comfortable quality attributed to it. Let's be charitable in the case of Vane. He's only kicking up his heels and snorting."

"If you're going to assume the mantle of charity with the view of covering the multitude of your sins—!" suggested Mrs. Carnby.

"We'll have to send it to the tailor's to have the tucks let out," said Radwalader, with infinite good humour. "Exactly, dear friend. Forgive me my little sermon. You see, the physician doesn't preach, as a rule, and I'm afraid the priest is equally unapt to practise. You must pardon me my shortcomings. I can't very well be all things to all men—much less to one woman. And, while we are on this subject, it may interest you to know that Vane has chosen his profession: he's going to be a novelist."

"Do you mean that he's going to write novels?" asked Mrs. Carnby.

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Radwalader appeared to reflect.

"No," he said presently. "I think I mean that he's going to be a novelist. I stand open to correction," he added, with an affected air of humility.

"By no means," answered Mrs. Carnby. "Probably I don't understand. It sounds to me a good deal like saying he's going to be a German Emperor or a Pope—that's all."

"Nevertheless, I'm quite sure that's what I mean. He has read me several chapters of a novel upon which he's at work, and I must say that they display a knowledge of women which, in a man of his years, is nothing less than remarkable."

"That's not impossible," put in Mrs. Carnby. "I had a letter, only yesterday, from a woman who knows him, and it appears that he's as good as engaged to a very charming young American."

"However," said Radwalader mildly, "I think the knowledge of women displayed by Vane in the chapters he was so good as to read to me is hardly such as one would expect to deduce from the fact that he is as good as engaged to a very charming young American."

"His choice of a profession must be a very recent resolution," said Mrs. Carnby. "To be sure, until to-day, I haven't seen him in a week."

"An eternity in Paris," said Kennedy. "Extra-ordinary people, the Americans! Not content with securing monopolies of tramways and industrial trusts over here, they appear to control a monopoly of feminine consideration as well. I confess—though only to the acacias—that I'm in the least degree weary of the subject of Mr. Andrew Vane. Radwalader, I'll give you twenty at cannons."

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"Done!" said Radwalader, rising.

"The cigars are on the corner-table in the billiard-room," observed Mrs. Carnby, "and the Scotch is on the dining-room *buffet*, with ice and soda. Don't call the servants for a half-hour, at least: it irritates them immeasurably to have their eating confused with other people's drinking."

"I really don't mean it as gossip," said Mrs. Ratchett, as the men vanished into the house. "I'm interested in Mr. Vane. He seems more rational and cleaner-cut than the American cubs one sees over here as a rule; and if he's only going to go the way of the rest of them—if there's a woman in the case—"

Mrs. Carnby shrugged her shoulders. "Andrew Vane has been in Paris for ten weeks," she said. "I think it not improbable that Paris will be in Andrew Vane for the rest of his natural life."

"Then there *is* a woman in the case!" exclaimed Mrs. Ratchett.

"So you say, my dear."

Mrs. Ratchett's pointed slipper began to beat an impatient tattoo on the grass.

"Could anything be more ludicrous than for us two to beat about the bush in this fashion?" she

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broke out, after a moment. "You know perfectly what I mean, Louisa—what one *always* means, in short, by 'a woman in the case!'"

"Yes, of course I know," agreed Mrs. Carnby frankly. "The women one speaks of as being in cases are always more or less disreputable. Well, there *is* a woman in the case of our young friend—and a very engaging woman at that."

"Engaging appears to be a habit with Mr. Vane's flames," said Mrs. Ratchett. "It's a little hard on the one in America. And pray where did *you* see her?—the other, I mean."

"Oh, here, there, and everywhere. Vane made the mistake, at first, of trying to carry on his little affair *sub rosa*. People are always seen when they try not to be, you know. Lately, I believe, they've been going about quite openly, so it has been almost impossible to keep track of them."

"But how do you arrive at the conclusion that the lady—"

"Isn't respectable? I've walked up the Opéra Comique stairway behind her, my dear, and there was no mistaking the social grade of her petticoats. They were entirely beyond a reputable woman's means. And you're quite right. It's downright hard on the other one. She's like my own daughter—Margery Palffy is."

"Margery Palffy! Why, how very surprising! I thought you said the girl was in America."

"No—I said 'a charming young American.' And it's really not surprising at all. My letter was from Mrs. Johnny Barrister—Madame Palffy's sister-in-law, you know. She always took charge of Margery during the summer vacations. They've a big house at Beverly, which I've never seen, and heaps of money. That's how Mr. Vane met Margery, I suppose: he seems to have had the run of the house. Molly Barrister mentioned him casually, but quite as if the engagement were a matter of course—quite as if he had come over here on purpose to see Margery."

"The lady with—er—the petticoats," suggested Mrs. Ratchett, "strikes me in the light of evidence to the contrary."

"One can never tell," said Mrs. Carnby. "He wouldn't be the first man to drive tandem. There's apt to be a leader, you see—a high-stepping, showy thoroughbred, that attracts all the attention, and does none of the work: and then, an earnest, faithful little cob, as wheeler. After a time, a man gets tired of the frills and furbelows, sells the leader to break some other fellow's neck, and settles down. Then you'll see the earnest little wheeler as much appreciated as may be, and dragging the domestic tilbury along at a rational, *bourgeois* rate of speed. One can never tell, my dear."

"All that," observed Mrs. Ratchett dryly, "doesn't ring true, Louisa, and—what's worse—it isn't even clever. You're fond of Margery Palffy."

"It's froth!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnby, "the kind of froth one sticks on the top of a horrid little pudding to conceal its disgusting lack of merit. Don't ask me what I think of men, Ethel. I couldn't tell you, without employing certain violent expletives, and nowadays no really original woman swears!"

A distant, whirring snore, very faint at first, had grown louder as they were speaking, and now swelled into a muffled roar, as Andrew's automobile lunged up the driveway, and stopped, sobbing, before the villa. Mrs. Carnby raised her voice, to carry across the lawn:

"Have you had breakfast?"

Andrew, turning from the automobile, waved his hand in reply.

"We broke down near the Pavillon Henri Quatre," he called. "The others had breakfast while I was making repairs. I coffeed so late that I wasn't hungry. I knew that I could hold over till tea-time."

The party, five in number, came chattering toward them across the lawn. Old Mrs. Lister led the way, followed by her son and Madame Palffy, whom Mrs. Carnby always invited to Poissy for the first Sunday of the season—"to get it over with," as she had been heard to say. Behind were Andrew and Margery. Jeremy was to bring Palffy, De Boussac, and Ratchett down by the late train, and these, with Kennedy, Radwalader, and Mrs. Ratchett, completed the house-party.

Mrs. Lister, whom Radwalader had described to Andrew as "the jail-breaker, because she never finishes a sentence," plunged abruptly into one of her disconnected prolations, addressing herself to Mrs. Carnby:

"Of course, we are *most* reprehensibly late—but you see—I don't understand about these things—Mr. Vane said—it's so difficult to comprehend—but it was something that the gravel—or was it the dust?—at all events—and I always say that meals above *all* things—but then accidents are simply *bound* to occur—I do hope you didn't wait—and it was delightful—my first experience—but of course we *had* to—there was no telling how long—though fortunately—and I'm quite fagged out, dear Mrs. Carnby—as I say to Jack—when one is young, you know—but when one gets to fifty-four—though I don't complain—I think one should never regret—and I enjoyed the drive—or does one say ride?—it's so difficult—"

She paused for breath, and Madame Palffy took up the tale.

"It was *fas*—cinating, *fas*—cinating," she said, "and most exciting. I reached St. Germain quite *en déshabille*. Mr. Vane kindly took Margery on the front seat. Mrs. Lister and I sat behind, and Mr. Lister on the floor, with his feet on the step. It was flying."

And she waved her fat hands, and sank ponderously into a chair.

"My most humble apologies, Mrs. Carnby," said Andrew. "It couldn't really be helped, and I provided my crew with sufficient nourishment to keep them alive till dinner."

"You're forgiven," replied his hostess, "only don't do it again. After all," she added, looking Andrew wickedly in the eye, "your crime, like dear old Sir Peter Teazle's, carried its punishment



along with it."

"Now I come to think of it," observed young Lister vacuously, "she's his second wife, Madame Palfy—or *is* she? Do you know the Flament-Gontouts, Mrs. Carnby? No? They live up in the Monceau quarter. She was an American, a Bostonian. Her maiden name was Fayne—sister of Clarence Fayne, the painter, who married Mary Clemin, the daughter of Anthony Clemin, who used to own the Parker House—"

He did not appear to be addressing any one in particular, which was fortunate, as no one had ever been known to vouchsafe him the compliment of attention. He spoke with as much variety of expression as an accountant making comparisons, and invariably, as now, upon the subject of birth, marriage, and death—a hopelessly dull young man.

"*He* write plays?" said Mrs. Carnby, when the purpose of his presence in Paris had been explained to her. "Never! But he may have written the thirty-sixth chapter of Genesis."

"I'm afraid that's quite cold," said Mrs. Carnby, as, in compliance with a request, she handed Andrew a cup of coffee, "but it's your own fault."

"Never mind," he laughed. "Coffee is one of the few things which are more or less good all the way up and down the thermometer from thirty-two to two hundred and twelve." [156]

Mrs. Carnby looked at him critically, as he stirred, and told herself that he came up strikingly well to many standards. His hair was neither too short nor too long, he was perfectly shaved, his stock was tied to a nicety, his clothes were on friendly terms with him, his hands were excellently well-kept—and an hour before he had been tinkering with a motor!—and his teeth were even and studiously cared for. He was an aristocrat, a patrician, from his head to his heels—and it *would* be a pity, thought Mrs. Carnby, to have him go the way of what Mrs. Ratchett had called "the rest of them"—the way of Tommy Clavercil, for example, whose late *affaire* had been so crudely mismanaged that he was no longer invited to the best tables in the Colony, or the way of Radwalader's young acquaintance, Ernest Baxter, who ended up in the Morgue. And then there was Margery—

Mrs. Carnby's eyes came round to her, instantly narrowed, and dropped. There are moments when the souls of us come to their twin windows, and look out, and shout our secrets to the veriest passer-by. Margery was looking at Andrew Vane—and Mrs. Carnby *saw*!

"*Good* Lord!" she thought. "Then at least half of the story's true—and I'm afraid that's about fifty per cent. too much!"

"The list of my offences isn't complete, as yet, Mrs. Carnby," said Andrew. "I very stupidly left my camera at the Pavilion. I'm afraid I shall have to go back for it." [157]

Once more Mrs. Carnby looked at him.

"I'll go with you," she said suddenly. "I haven't had a chance to see how your machine runs, as yet, and, besides, every one of these lazy people will be wanting to take a nap presently. I know them of old. I never nap myself. It's a fattening habit."

"Delighted to have you, I'm sure, Mrs. Carnby."

There was the slightest trace of hesitation in Andrew's voice, but Mrs. Carnby rose to her feet.

"I may be back to tea, and I may be back to-morrow," she said to the others. "One never knows, *en automobile*."

She was still frowning perplexedly, as Andrew steered the automobile deftly out of the gate.

"It's turned a bit windy," he said. "We didn't use the dust-cloths coming over, but there's one under the seat. What do you say—shall we have it?"

He bent forward, as she nodded, and dragged the cloth from its place beneath them. Something heavy rapped smartly on Mrs. Carnby's foot, and she looked down with a little exclamation.

"What's that?"

"That?" answered Andrew. "Why—er, that's my camera."

Mrs. Carnby leaned back in her seat, drawing the dust-cloth smoothly over her knees. [158]

"Don't you think," she said deliberately, "that you had better tell me your *real* reason for wanting to go back to St. Germain—and wanting to go back alone?"

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## CHAPTER X.

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### THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.

They were mounting the steep incline of the Route de Poissy before Andrew replied. He had been staring fixedly ahead, absorbed apparently in the business of guiding the automobile around the sharp turns of the side streets, before they struck the wide main road. It was almost as if he had not heard the remark at all; but Mrs. Carnby knew better. And she was one of the discerning persons who never build els on telling observations. Despite the tension with which the following pause was instinct, it was Andrew, not she, who first spoke.

"That was a very singular speech, Mrs. Carnby."

"*On fait ce qu'on peut*," said Mrs. Carnby. "You're a very singular young man, Mr. Vane."

"I have my failings, of course," said Andrew, a trifle coolly. "I'm only human, you know. We're all of us that."

"Unfortunately, you're *not* 'only human' my dear young friend; you're masculine as well. And we're not all of us *that*, thank Heaven!"

"Aren't we talking a little blindly?" suggested Andrew.

"Yes, possibly," agreed his companion, "but some things aren't easy to say. Do you remember that when one of the old prophets undertook to haul a monarch over the coals for his misdeeds, he would always begin with a parable? I think, in this instance, I shall follow the established precedent." [160]

"I was afraid you were going to begin by saying you were old enough to be my mother," retorted Andrew, with a faint smile.

"I always skip unimportant details," said Mrs. Carnby. She observed with satisfaction that, without increasing the speed at the top of the incline, Andrew had turned from the direct route to St. Germain into one of the forest by-roads. Evidently he was in no haste to curtail the conversation.

"I'm waiting," he observed presently.

"Where I used to spend my summers, on the South Shore," said Mrs. Carnby, with her eyes on the interlacing foliage overhead, "it was the custom of the natives to make collections of marine trophies from the beach and the rock-pools, and work upon them sundry transformations, with an aim to alleged artistic effectiveness. They glued the smaller shells and coloured pebbles on boxes and mirror-frames; and painted landscapes on the pearl finish of the larger mussels; and tied baby-ribbon around the sea-urchin shells; and gilded the dried starfish. You know what I mean—the kind of thing that comes under the head of 'A Present from North Scituate' or 'Souvenir of Nantasket Beach.' But you may, perhaps, have remarked the appearance of one and all of these objects while they were as yet where nature was pleased to put them—on the sand, that is, or in the tidal pools. Do you remember the sheen of the pebbles, the soft pinks and grays of the starfish? Is there anything comparable to these, in the artistic combination of all the gilt paint and baby-ribbon in the world? It seems to suggest, as a possibility, that nature knows best; and that in lacking the simple touch of sea-water they lack the one thing which ever made them beautiful at all. It opens up a whole tragedy in the phrase 'out of one's element.' That's my parable." [161]

"You'll remember," said Andrew, falling in with her whim, "that the transgressing monarch rarely understood what the prophet was driving at in his parable. I, too, must follow precedent."

"Shall I speak plainly?" asked Mrs. Carnby, laying her hand for an instant on his arm.

"Very, please. There seems to be something rather serious back of all this."

"*Eh bien!* You're a young man, Andrew Vane, to whom fate has been uncommonly civil. Your family is rather exceptionally good, on—er—on both sides. Your means are, or will be, some day, almost uncomfortably ample. You're more than passably good-looking, and you're surprisingly clever. Your health is magnificent, and, finally, nature chose America as your environment."

"A mixed blessing, that last!"

"Five words, with Thomas Radwalader in every letter!" said Mrs. Carnby. "I should think you'd find the *rôle* of phonograph rather unsatisfying." [162]

"I thought you liked him," said Andrew, flushing.

"And I like the obelisk!" nodded Mrs. Carnby, "but that doesn't necessarily imply that I should like half a hundred tin facsimiles set up in its immediate vicinity, and making the Place de la Concorde look like a colossal asparagus-bed! There are only three ways in which a man can be distinguished, nowadays. He must be unimaginably rich, unspeakably immoral, or unquestionably original. You're not the first, as yet, and you've just proved that you're not the last."

"I'm not the second, I hope?"

Mrs. Carnby pursed her lips, and wrinkled her forehead.

"Perhaps not *unspeakably* immoral," she said, "but immoral—yes, I think you're that. Of course, there are many different conceptions of immorality, and mine may be unique. Let us come back to my parable. What I mean is this. You were born with every natural good fortune, and your breeding and education secure to you every social advantage which one could possibly desire. You've been placed, like the sea-urchins or the starfish, in a situation preëminently befitting you. You're American in every detail of your sane, clean make-up, my friend, and you've been given America, the sanest, cleanest country on God's globe, in which to develop and achieve. Might one ask what you're doing over here? Getting a finish?—that's what it's called, isn't it? Allowing yourself, that is to say, to be tied up with the baby-ribbon and decorated with the gilt paint of Parisian frivolity! And when you go back—if you ever do—to live in America, what will you be? 'A Souvenir of Paris,' my good sir, 'A Present from the Invalides,' as undeniably as if somebody had lettered the words on your forehead in ornamental script, and pasted a photograph of Napoleon's tomb on your shirt-bosom. That's what I call immoral. I like you better as an American; I like you better with the sheen of the salt water on you; I like you better in your element, Mr. Andrew Vane!" [163]

"I never heard anything better in the way of a sermon," said Andrew, groping for an answer.

"It's too true to be good," retorted Mrs. Carnby. "Do you believe any of it?"

"Some, perhaps—not all. And the whole attack is a little abrupt. What *have* I been doing?"

"Nothing! You've hit upon precisely the objection. '*Teke!*—thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting!' Margery Palffy is like my own daughter to me, Mr. Vane. She calls me her fairy godmother, you know. Are you looking forward to introducing her to Mirabelle Tremonceau?"

Mrs. Carnby was once more contemplating the forest foliage overhead. For the second time in fifteen minutes, her instinct for distinguishing the line which separates the boldly effective from the futilely impertinent was standing her in good stead. As a matter of fact, Andrew had *not* been weighed in the balances—but he was just about to be!

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The forest was all alive with the lisp of leaves, and the shifting dapple of sunlight and shadow, and, even as she waited, Mrs. Carnby smiled quietly to herself, in pure enjoyment of the great Gothic arches of green, that seemed to thrill and shiver with delight under the warm sunlight and the fresh west wind. The forest, like the sea, has in its every mood a magnificent dignity of its own—a superb indifference to the transitory doings of man, which dwarfs human affairs to an aspect of utter triviality. The world which Mrs. Carnby knew, and toward which her attitude was alternately one of keen appreciation and of good-natured contempt—the world of fashion and frivolity and easy cynicism, seemed, as she contrasted it with this vast serenity, to become incomparably little. The suggestion of endurance and repose with which these shadowy reaches, opening to right and left, were eloquent, lent a curious contemptible tawdriness to the little comedy, so conceivably potential tragedy, in which she and the man beside her were playing each a part. How little difference it made, after all, if men were fools or blackguards, and women wantons or martyrs! For a moment she was sorry she had spoken. She felt that here and now she could not quarrel, or even dispute, with Andrew over what he chose to do. The intrusion of intrigue and dissipation into these forest fastnesses was hideously incongruous.

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"There's cruelty in what you have said, but I can see that it's not wanton cruelty, and that there's kindness as well."

Andrew was speaking slowly, thoughtfully; almost, thought Mrs. Carnby to herself, as if he, too, had been touched by the softening sympathy of the forest. But she shook off the mood which had been stealing over her, as being wholly inadequate to the demand upon her fund of resource. What was needed, far from being the influence of elemental nature, was the keenest, if most worldly, diplomacy of which she was mistress. She straightened herself, and began to put on her gloves, working the fingers with the patient care of one who understood that, with a glove above all things, it is *le premier pas qui coute*. Inwardly she was keying taut the strings of her self-possession. She realized that emotion would be as fatal to her purpose as would sheer frivolity.

"Under your words," continued Andrew, "I can see that there must lie a more or less intimate knowledge of many things which we have never mentioned—many things which I did not suppose you would ever—"

"Find out? You really *are* young, aren't you? Why, my dear Mr. Vane, any given woman of average intelligence can find out whatever she chooses about any given man, provided always she hasn't the fatal handicap of being in love with him. Not that I've been spying upon you, understand. It's hardly a matter of vital concern to me if you go completely to the dogs, but Margery would probably give her heart's blood to hold you back. Therefore, people tell *me* all the facts, and keep *her* in total ignorance. That's the way of the world. Why, my good sir, I could probably tell you at this moment how you've spent fifty per cent. of your time for the past week, and, between them, the other women back there at the villa could account for another quarter. With gossip all things are possible."

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"I didn't think I was of sufficient importance to call for such strict surveillance," said Andrew.

"You're not! That's precisely what you must learn about the American Colony. It's what things are done, not who does them, that makes four-fifths of the gabble. A man's a man, and a woman's a woman, and an intrigue's an intrigue. You could tag them exhibits A, B, and C, and the Colony would find almost as much to talk about as if you gave the full names. What's not known is made up. It's necessary to find tea-table topics, and necessity is the mother of invention. You can have no idea, unless you're in the thick of the gossip, how absorbing any one person's affairs can be, when there's nothing better to talk about."

She admitted frankly to herself that she was talking to gain time, giving Andrew a chance to find his line of reply. It was going to be important, that reply, at least for Margery Palffy. Mrs. Carnby would undoubtedly have been at a loss to give a word-for-word rendition of the duties of a sponsor in baptism, either fairy or otherwise, according to the Book of Common Prayer. She recollected vaguely certain references to the pomps and vanities of the world, and realized, with a little inward smile, that she was warring more earnestly against these—and the rest—in her adopted goddaughter's behalf than ever she had considered it necessary to do in her own.

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"As it happens," she continued, "there's been no one else to claim the centre of the stage for the past few weeks, and therefore the lime-light has been turned upon you, as being the latest novelty—and a highly enterprising one at that! I think it manifestly impossible that you could have performed all the exploits credited to you, even had you given all your time to the task, with no allowance for eating and sleeping. But I think, too, that you would be surprised to find how extremely realistic gossip can be at times, and how much that you think is known only to yourself or to a few is, in fact, the talk of half the Colony. You remember dear old Sir Peter Teazle? I seem always to be quoting him. He knew such an infinite deal, and guessed so much more. 'I leave my character behind me,' he said, in parting from the scandal-mongers. Now, that's *so* true of Paris—only more. My dear Andrew Vane, not only do you leave your character at the tea-table you are quitting, but you'll meet it, more or less torn to shreds, at that to which you are going: and, if you were at the pains, you might find it, in a like state of demoralization, at a dozen others in the same *arrondissement*! I wish I could make you understand that. It seems to me to be so important to the conduct of life to know not only how we stand, but in what manner we fall."

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"As yet the charge against me seems to be a trifle indefinite," suggested Andrew.

"On the contrary," retorted Mrs. Carnby, "I mentioned the young person's name quite distinctly

—the one, you know, whom you saw by chance at the Pavillon Henri Quatre, and whom you were going back to meet."

"I can't pretend to misunderstand you," began Andrew, "but of course any reflection upon Mademoiselle Tremonceau—"

"Now, my dear man, *pray* don't be comic!" burst in Mrs. Carnby. "That sort of thing is as grotesque in these days as the doctrine of original sin. And of all places in the world—Paris! Oh no! A spade's a spade here, believe me, and when one is *demi-mondaine*, like Mirabelle Tremonceau, one is perfectly understood. *She* knows, and *you* know, and *I* know. Don't let us argue over the indisputable."

"I *didn't* know, at first," said Andrew gravely, "and, if I have guessed recently, you must not take that to mean that our relations have changed in the least degree. There's nothing between Mademoiselle Tremonceau and myself that I could not mention, Mrs. Carnby—absolutely nothing. But her friend I've been, and her friend I am. I'm not prepared to hear her branded as a 'moral leper' or something of the sort. How hard you are, you good women!"

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"I suppose," said Mrs. Carnby resignedly, "that when one adds two and two, the result is bound to be four. It isn't ever five or thirty-seven, by any chance, is it, just by way of variety? It's provokingly inevitable; but not more so than what a man will say under certain circumstances. Do I really seem to you that kind of person? Do you really imagine that I'm objecting to your *penchant* for the little Tremonceau, on the ground that her ideas of moral deportment are not all that might be desired? I hadn't thought that I gave the impression of being so desperately archaic."

"But you were about to warn me—"

"Merely to keep that self-same eccentricity of deportment well in mind, my friend. *Chacun dans sa niche*, Mr. Vane—the little Tremonceau and you, as well as the rest of us. And hers is not the Palais de Glace before four o'clock, nor yet a *matinée classique* at the Français; and yours is not her victoria in the Bois. Don't be crude. A certain amount of privacy in the conduct of such affairs is as troublesome as a pocket-handkerchief or a bathing-suit—but quite as essential. *Ne vous affichez pas*. It only shows you to be an amateur—in the American sense—and to be amateurish, nowadays, is to be grotesque. And, of course, it doesn't make any difference how innocent your relations may be. So long as Mirabelle Tremonceau is a figure in the calculation, there's no reason why people should not believe anything they choose."

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"You mentioned Miss Palffy," ventured Andrew. "Have you heard that she—that I—"

"Indirectly. That, frankly, is why I have taken the liberty of meddling in your affairs. It really isn't quite fair on the girl to bungle things. So long as you're going to work to gallicize yourself, pray make a thorough job of it. Don't copy the Frenchman's license, and neglect to imitate his discretion. I abhor half-made methods."

"But Miss Palffy—"

"Is heels over head in love with you, Mr. Vane. That much I know. I don't ask about *your* feelings. As a matter of fact, they haven't much bearing on the main issue, which is that I don't mean to have her disappointed in her estimate of you, for want of a friendly warning from an old woman who has seen many a young man spoil his life just because he took serious things too lightly and trivial ones too seriously."

"I wonder how much of this is serious advice, Mrs. Carnby," said Andrew suddenly, and with a perceptible ring of irritation in his voice, "and how much of it banter, with more than a suggestion of contempt. Apparently you're urging me to a change of course; actually, only to a change of method. I know you can't approve of my friendship for Mademoiselle Tremonceau, and yet you're not asking me to give it up, but only to put it out of sight and hearing. Isn't that—excuse me—but isn't it rather like trafficking with one's ideas of right and wrong? If one's doing no harm, why not go on? If one's to blame, why not pull up short?"

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"Oh, nobody pulls up short, in these days," said Mrs. Carnby, "except habitual drunkards who have been pronounced incurable. One mustn't ask too much of people. It's like the servants: the old-fashioned kind used to brush the dust into a dust-pan, wrap it up in newspapers, and see that the ash-man carried it off; now they sweep it under the beds and sofas, where it can't be seen. One mustn't complain of knowing it's there, so long as it isn't actually in evidence. *Autre temps autres mœurs*. It's a long cry from Hester Prynne to Mirabelle Tremonceau. Besides, pulling up short all by oneself is one thing, and pulling a woman up short into the bargain is quite another. She might object, the little Tremonceau."

"She hasn't the shadow of a claim on me."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Carnby, wrinkling her eyes amusedly at the corners, "of course not." Inwardly she added, "Two and two make four!"

"Whereas Margery—"

"Whereas Margery," echoed Mrs. Carnby, "will play a part which convention has made absolutely iron-clad. She will continue to love, as she loves now, an ideal man, endowed with an almost embarrassing multiplicity of imaginary virtues; and, incidentally, will pray daily that she may become worthy of him. Then, when he has sown his wild oats, perhaps he'll come to her, at his own good pleasure, and lay at her feet what he has achieved—a pleasant smattering of things generally talked about, a comprehensive intimacy with things generally *not* talked about, a tobacco heart, and a set of nerves which make him unfit for publication three days in the week. With these somewhat insufficient materials she will proceed to build up something indefinitely resembling her original ideal. And they will be married. And they will live—hem! *happily*—ever afterwards!"

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Andrew swung the automobile round a sharp corner with a vicious jerk, and they emerged from the shelter of the wood-road, and found themselves again upon the glaring white of the Route de Poissy. St. Germain was not far distant. They could see the *octroi* and the first houses through the trees. But it was toward Poissy that Andrew turned.

"Shall we go back?" he asked.

"If you think the little Tremonceau won't be angry at the delay," answered Mrs. Carnby pleasantly.

"I'm fond of her," said Andrew abruptly, "very."

"I'm glad of that," said Mrs. Carnby, almost with enthusiasm. "It excuses a great deal. I confess I was afraid that you were trying to be big—to 'show off,' as the children say. After all, she's the most beautiful *cocotte* in Paris, and the most sought after. One couldn't have blamed you for being flattered. But if you're really fond of her, one can't very well do anything except be glad that it's impossible you should always be so."

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"Why impossible?" demanded Andrew. "I'm bound to confess that it seems to me to be quite within the range of likelihood that I should always be fond of her. Why impossible?"

"It's hard to explain—that," said Mrs. Carnby, "but those women don't wear. They seem to be only plated with fascination, and in time the plating wears off, and you come back to the kind with the Hall-mark. I'm perfectly at ease about that. I've known too many cases of its happening. Oh, I know how it all is now! The polish is absolutely dazzling, and you can't imagine that it will ever be different. That's a symptom of the earliest stages, but the disease will run its regular course."

"You rather touch one on the quick, Mrs. Carnby. I think perhaps neither of us realizes what an extremely unusual conversation this has been."

"I shouldn't call it commonplace," said Mrs. Carnby, "and I think you've stood it beautifully. But I want to ask you one more question. *Do you love Margery?*"

"With all my heart and soul and strength, Mrs. Carnby!"

"Then, my dear young friend, it's time to think what you're about. There's only one thing for you to do. The path lies open before you—and I think you'll have the courage and the good sense, to say nothing of the common decency, to follow it!"

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## CHAPTER XI.

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### SOME AFTER-DINNER CONVERSATION.

Night in the garden of the Villa Rossignol was as night is nowhere else. The cool dusk softened the somewhat stilted formality of the flower-beds and winding walks, and mercifully blurred the uncompromising stiffness of the paved terrace, flanked by marble urns, and giving, in three broad steps, upon the lawn. At this season the air was neither warm nor chill, but so deliciously adjusted that, as it moved, its touch on the cheeks and forehead was like that of a woman's fingers. The stillness was emphasized rather than disturbed by a tiny tinkle of water, falling from ledge to ledge of a rockery hidden in the trees, and the sound, hardly less liquid, of a nightingale, rehearsing, pianissimo, snatches of the melody that midnight would hear in full. The darkness seemed to drip perfume: for the little seats and summer-houses, cunningly hidden here and there among the *bosquets*, were veritable bowers of roses, and the new grass and foliage had that fresh June smell which July, with its dust and scorching suns, so soon turns stale.

The women were on the terrace now; the men inside. Through the windows of the west wing, open from floor to ceiling to the soft night air, the big dining-table gleamed with linen, silver, and crystal, in not ungraceful disarray, and above it hung a thin haze of blue-gray smoke, through which the shirt-bosoms and white waistcoats of the men stood oddly out, seeming to have no relation to their owners, whose faces were cut off by the deep-red candle-shades from the light, and so from the view of those outside. Now and again their laughter came out through the windows in rollicking little gusts, and immediately thereafter the haze of smoke was reinforced.

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"What an amusing time they always seem to have, once they're rid of us!" said Mrs. Ratchett, almost resentfully. "If one could be a fly, now, and perch in comfort, upside down, upon the ceiling—"

"One would get a vast deal of tobacco-smoke into one's lungs," put in Mrs. Carnby, "and a vast store of unrepeatable anecdotes into one's memory. I really can't approve of your project, Ethel, and I'm convinced that, to your particular style of beauty, it would be most unbecoming to perch—particularly upside down!"

"Oh, the men!" exclaimed old Mrs. Lister, with a kind of ecstatic wriggle. "What *do* you suppose?—but of course we shall never know—I dare say we'd be quite shocked—but it sounds entertaining—and they say, you know, that the cleverest stories—and Mr. Radwalader must be an adept—if only we *could*—!"

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"For my part," observed Madame Palffy majestically, "I have no desire to overhear anything in the nature of *double entendre*."

"Oh, shade of Larousse!" murmured Mrs. Carnby into her coffee-cup. "Where *did* the creature learn her French? Shall we take a little walk?" she added aloud, turning to Margery.

"Why, yes—with pleasure, Mrs. Carnby," answered the girl, with a quick start. Her eyes had

been fixed upon an indistinct form beyond the window of the dining-room, which was the person of Mr. Andrew Vane.

For a few moments they trod the winding gravel path in silence. Then, as a clump of shrubbery hid the house from view, she stopped impulsively, and laid her hand on the arm of her hostess.

"Fairy godmother—" she began.

"Now, my dear girl," interrupted Mrs. Carnby, "don't say anything you'll be sorry for afterwards. I'm a very vain, weak, silly, gossipy old woman—but I *am* a woman, Margery, and that means that I often see things I'm not meant to see, and which I wish I hadn't. Don't give me your confidence just because you feel that I may have guessed—"

"I *know* you've guessed, Mrs. Carnby!" broke in Margery, "and, after all, it's just as well, because I must speak to some one. I feel, somehow, as if I'd lost my way, and I think I'm a little frightened. I've always been very sure of myself till now, very confident of my ability to judge what was the right thing to do, and to get on without advice. But now—it's different. I'm unhappy." [178]

Mrs. Carnby slid her arm across the girl's shoulders.

"Go on, my dear," she said. "I didn't mean that I wasn't willing to listen—only that I wouldn't like to feel that I was surprising your confidence."

"First of all," said Margery, "and in spite of everybody's kindness to me, I'm afraid I hate this new life, which is so different from everything I've learned to know and love. I hate all this pretence and posing which we're carrying on, day after day, among people who smirk before our faces and ridicule us behind our backs; and I'm coming to hate myself worst of all. I want my life to be better than that of a butterfly among a lot of wasps! In America I hadn't time to stop and think whether I was happy or not, and I've read somewhere that that is just what true happiness means. Everything was very natural and simple over there. I used to wake up wanting to sing, and life seemed to begin all over again every morning. And then, without the least warning, came to me—what you've guessed, you know. I was sure of it at once. There was nothing said, but one feels such things, don't you think?—feels them coming, just as one feels the dawn sometimes, even while it's still quite dark? I had a little hint or two—just enough to make me confident and happier than ever. I knew there were reasons for his not speaking: I guessed at his grandfather, and a very little thought showed me that it could do no harm to wait. I wanted him to be sure, just as sure as I was. I was even content to come away and leave him. I *knew*, you see, and I saw it was only a question of time. I never doubted for a moment how it would end, and so I wasn't the least bit surprised when he came through the *salon* door, that Sunday in Paris. I thought—I was *sure* he'd come for me. I could have shouted, I was so happy, Mrs. Carnby! I had to turn away and pretend to be admiring some roses, I remember, because I felt that I was smiling—no, *grinning*—and just at nothing! Well—" [179]

She paused, with a catch in her throat, and then went on determinedly.

"I've—I've been waiting ever since. We're good friends, almost *too* good friends, but there's something missing, something gone. I'm afraid you'll hardly understand me if I say that ever since last summer in Beverly I've felt that he belonged to me—all of him—every bit. Now—well, I can't feel that way any longer. It is just as if I were sharing him with somebody or something, and not getting the better or even the larger part. I've heard—well, you know how gossip goes! I've heard that there was another girl. He's been seen with her, often and often. People might have spared me, if they'd known: but of course they didn't; and so I've picked up fragments and fragments of talk, and every one has cut me like a knife. In the midst of all this, he came to me and asked me—no! he asked me nothing, but I knew what he meant. I put him off. I felt that I must have time to think. But the moment for decision has come. He may ask me again at any time. What shall I say? Fairy godmother, what *shall* I say? I *want* to trust him! I want to stake my confidence in him against all the gossip in the world. And yet if he's only asking me because he thinks I expect it, if he really doesn't *want* me—" [180]

"He *does* want you!" said Mrs. Carnby. "I could shake you, Margery. You're *so* far off the track, and at the same time you make it so hard to show you why. Let me see."

She hesitated, biting her lips.

"Look here," she continued suddenly. "Suppose you had a baby brother, for example, and you loved him better than all the world, and you knew that, in his baby way, he felt the same love for you, and you should carry him, all of a jump, into the next room, and plant him down in front of a ten-foot Christmas-tree, all blazing with candles and glass balls and whatchercalls—cornucopias—would you be surprised if he hadn't any use for you for at least an hour? No, you wouldn't—not a bit of it! You'd think it quite natural. Well, there you are! You are yourself, and baby brother's Andrew Vane, and the Christmas tree's Paris: and you'll just have to wait, that's all, till he's through blinking and sucking his thumb!"

"Oh, Mrs. Carnby!" said Margery, laughing in spite of herself. "Can't you see that, much as I am afraid of Paris for my own sake, I'm more afraid of it for his?" [181]

"My dear," said Mrs. Carnby, with a change of tone, "nowadays one's forced to take rather a liberal view of things. There are only a few delusions left, and love's not one of them—more's the pity! The best flowers, Margery—and I grant you love is one of the *very* best—are brought to perfection by methods which it's not always pleasant to follow in detail. There's a deal of hacking and pruning and fertilizing and cross-breeding with ignobler growths to be gone through with before one obtains a satisfactory result. It's like the most inviting dishes served up by one's *chef*: if we had the dangerous curiosity to pry into all the stages of their preparation, I doubt if very many of them would stand the test and prove so tempting, after all. That's the way with a man. When he brings us his love, we have to accept it, without inquiring too closely how it has come to

be. You won't think me vain if I say all men can't be Jeremy Carnbys? When they know *how* to love, more often than not it's because they've learned; and as to how they *learned*, it's for our own good not to be too inquisitive. Usually, my dear, it means another woman, and not a woman one would be apt to call upon, at that."

"Mrs. Carnby!"

"Yes. Don't be provincial, Margery. I've no patience with the whitewash business. It's better at all times to look things squarely in the face, even if doing so makes—er—your eyes water! There's hardly a woman happily married to-day who hasn't been preceded, and rather profitably preceded, I venture to say, by another woman—and not a very good woman either. She's there in the background, but we have to ignore her, and by the time we notice her at all it's more than likely she has ceased to be important. She's been the method of preparing the dish, that's all, the fertilizer which has made the rose of love possible. She has taught the man what neither you nor any girl in the least like you could teach him—the things which are not worth while! We get the better part. She has burned up the chaff. We get the wheat."

Margery had tightly locked her hands.

"Fairy godmother," she said, "you don't want me to believe that, do you? You don't want me to be only the whim of a man's changed fancy, the thing on which he practises all he has learned from—from—"

"I would to Heaven I could *make* a man fit for you!" answered Mrs. Carnby, drawing the girl close to her, "but, since I can't do that, I want you to see things in their true light, and to learn that charity begins in the same place which is called a woman's sphere, and that love, from her standpoint, is little more than forgiveness on the endless instalment plan!"

"But Andrew—" said Margery eagerly.

"Andrew Vane is only a man," said Mrs. Carnby sententiously. "He can't be made out a seraph even by the fact that you—er—"

"Love him," supplemented the girl brokenly. "I see what you mean. I would have given anything in the world to have saved him from this, and—it's too late, already."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnby. "Now's the time when he needs you most. If you couldn't win him away from any woman that ever lived, good or bad, you wouldn't be Margery Palffy! Bless me! I must be getting back to the others, my dear. Now don't take this too much to heart. It's all coming out right in the end. These things are only temporary, at worst. Be brave, Margery."

"Oh—brave!" answered Margery, flinging up her chin. "Yes, I shall be that. Don't fear but that I shall know how to handle the situation now. And—thank you, fairy godmother. I'll wait here a few minutes, if you don't mind, and just—*think!*"

As she walked toward the villa again, Mrs. Carnby compressed her lips.

"Now there's a deal of common sense in that girl," she said to herself. "She must have inherited it from her grandparents!"

But, with all her shrewdness, she had never more hopelessly complicated a situation.

For a time Margery lingered, compelled by the need of reflection and the beauty of the night. All about her the blue-black darkness, eloquent with the breath of the roses and the fluting of the now-emboldened nightingale, sighed and turned in its sleep, as if it dreamed of pleasant things. Paris, with its frivolities, its sins, its sorrows, and its snares, was like some uneasy, half-forgotten dream. The brand had touched the girl, but as yet it had no more than stung, it had not seared. The sword quivered, but the thread yet held. The merciful garment of the calm, sweet night yet smothered, like sleep before awakening, the bitterness of full reality. The moment was one of those oases in the desert of disillusion which, with the crystal clamour of falling water, the cool shade of widespread foliage, and the odour of fresh, moist earth, alone make tolerable the journey of the caravan.

So it was that Margery was able to speak naturally, with the knowledge of having herself well in hand, as a step crunched on the gravel near by, and Andrew flung his cigarette upon the path, where it spawned in a quantity of tiny points of light, which gloomed immediately into nothingness.

"How extravagant you are! Surely you must know by this time that I don't mind smoke in the least. I was just about to go in."

"Not yet for a moment, please," said Andrew. "Let's come into this little arbour. There's something I want to say."

He pointed, as he spoke, to a small marble-columned seat in the shrubbery, buried under a great hood of climbing rose-vines in full bloom. For an instant only the girl hesitated. Then she led the way resolutely, gathering her light shawl more closely about her shoulders, with something like a shiver, despite the warmth of the still June evening. For a little they sat in silence. When Andrew spoke, it was with an abruptness which told of embarrassment.

"You remember, perhaps, what you said to me the other day in Paris—about fighting a good fight, and keeping the faith? Will you tell me just what you meant by that? It's been haunting me, lately. When you said that the influence of Paris made you afraid for those—for those for whom you might care, did you mean—*me?*"

He laid his hand on hers, as he asked the question, but she drew away slightly, and he straightened himself again, with a little puzzled frown.

"Please don't ask me to answer that," she said, after a moment. "Whatever I meant, it can make no difference now."

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"No difference, Margery? Do you want me to understand that you were not in earnest—that you really didn't care?"

"I haven't said that," answered the girl wearily. "I said it could make no difference now, now that the mischief's done."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," said Andrew slowly.

"Oh, pray don't let's discuss it. I've no right to question you."

"No right?"

"No right at all, and, as a matter of fact, when I said that I didn't mean to. Perhaps I *was* thinking of you, in part. I'm sorry I presumed. Only one doesn't like to see one's friends make fools of themselves—and that's what most men do in Paris, isn't it? Never mind. It's like our golf at Beverly. I prefer to have you play the game, and keep your own tally."

"The game?" demanded Andrew. "What game? What do you mean?"

"Oh, the game that all men play—the game in which we have no part, of which we must not even speak or hear, we women who respect ourselves. Don't let's talk of it. We're supposed to be friends, and for that reason I'll overlook what you don't absolutely force me to see. That's my part, isn't it?—to pretend I don't understand, even when I do? And I do—I *do*! I'm not cynical, but neither am I a fool. I've lived in Paris only a little while, but long enough to know that when one says 'boys will be boys' it sometimes means—oh, more than putty-blowers, and coming indoors with wet feet, and pulling out the parrot's tail-feathers!"

She stopped abruptly, with a perception that she was overdoing her assumption of unconcern, that she was talking wildly, that her voice had taken on an unnatural strain.

"I don't understand you in the least," said Andrew deliberately, "or at least I'm sure that what you seem to be saying isn't what you really mean. I can't believe that after all that has been—after all I have hoped was going to be—why, Margery, I came out here—no, I came all the way from America, to ask you—"

"*Don't!*"

Margery had risen with the word, and now, leaning against one of the marble columns of the little arbour, was looking away into the gloom.

"I want to believe in you," she added. "Leave me that, at least. Play the game, Andy—play the game!"

"The game—the game—the game!" exclaimed Andrew. "What is all this you're saying, Margery? What are you accusing me of? Is it possible you don't know I love you—that I've always loved you, ever since first I saw you? I'd have asked you long ago, at Beverly, but my grandfather begged me, almost commanded me, to wait. We were both so young. He wanted me to make sure. And, although I knew that I should never change, I felt he was right. I wanted you to have your chance, to come out, to see a little bit of life, before I tried to bind you to any promise. And when I heard that you were not coming back to America this year, that you *had* come out, and were the beauty and the belle of the Colony here, I knew that it was time to make a try for you, unless I was to lose you forever. So I came over here to tell you this—to ask you to marry me. And now—in Heaven's name, what *is* it, Margery? What has changed you? What do you mean by all this? If there is anything I can explain—"

The girl turned to him, with a little, piteous gesture.

"Have I asked you for an explanation?" she said. "Do I need one—since I *know*? You say you'd have asked me long ago. Well, then, I ask you—why didn't you? Why didn't you ask me before it was too late? Why didn't you ask me while yet you had something to offer me which I could have accepted gratefully—your innocence, your purity, the best of all that was in you, and to which I had a right, do you hear?—a right! Why didn't you speak then, before you'd thrown all these away, sold your birthright, and become like all the rest? Do you come to me *now*—now, with another woman's kisses on your lips, and God only knows what of the impurity she has taught you in your heart? Do you come to me like that, and expect me to welcome you, to accept the fact that I am your second choice after a woman whose name you would not mention to me—"

"Margery—Margery!"

"Do you deny it? Do you deny that you were with her—when?—yesterday? Oh, be true at least to *one* thing, whatever it be—if not to the faith you owed me, if all you've been telling me is true, then to the woman you've preferred before me—to your mistress, to your mistress, Andrew Vane!"

Andrew fell back a step, putting up his hands as if to ward off a blow.

"It was for this," he faltered, "that you told me to come here—to ask you anything I chose?"

"You know better than that!" said Margery firmly.

"Then Mrs. Carnby has been telling you—"

"Mrs. Carnby has told me nothing except what I knew—or, rather, tried not to know—before. It isn't from her I learned. The truth has come to me bit by bit, and I've fought against it as it came, trying to believe in you to the very last."

"And you think—"

"Yes—yes! I think—I *know*! How quick you were to refer to Mrs. Carnby! She knows, of course—everybody knows—even I! Well, I don't want to criticise you or blame you. You've forced me into it by making me part of all this. Now, all I ask of you is to respect me, to leave me out of what you choose to do in future, and not to mock the name of love with this pitiful fancy for me—a fancy so trivial and so idle that it couldn't even hold you back from transgression. I ask you to go back to her, or, if you're tired of her already, at least not to come to me. I'm different from

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these other women, who can laugh at such things, and gloss them over, and forget them. I demand of the man who asks me to marry him the selfsame thing that he demands of me. I demand that he shall be pure!"

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The girl's voice broke suddenly, and she pressed her cheek against one of the marble columns of the little arbour, battling against the insistence of her tears.

"You must forgive me," she said presently. "I have no right to speak as I have done, but—if you've guessed the reason, that is part of my humiliation and my shame. Will you go now? I want to be alone."

"How can I?" said Andrew slowly. "How can I leave you, even for an hour, while you think as you do? It would mean that all was over between us forever."

"All *is* over," answered Margery, "as much over as if you or I had been dead for twenty years!"

"Listen to me!" exclaimed Andrew hotly. "And you shall have the truth, if that's what you want. There *is* such a woman—yes! But she is no more a part of my life than that bird out there. She has been an incident, nothing more. You had only to ask me, and I would never have seen her again. You have only to ask me now—"

"Ah, stop!" broke in Margery. "Don't make me despise you!"

"*Margery!*" He had stumbled forward blindly into this abortive explanation, remembering for the moment nothing but his own knowledge of the truth. Now, as she checked him, a sickening sense of what his words must signify to her swept down upon him, and he covered his face with his hands.

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"I don't know how to put it," he murmured. "I don't know what to say."

"You have said quite enough," replied Margery. Her voice was quite cool, quite steady now. "I have asked you once to leave me. Will you please go now—at once?"

Andrew dropped his hands, and searched her face with his eyes. There was no trace in it of any emotion beyond a slight contempt.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that this is the end?"

"The end?" she repeated. "The end—er—of *what?*"

With that he left her.

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## CHAPTER XII.

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### REACTION.

Noon of the following day found Andrew once more in the Rue Boissière. He had not seen Margery from the moment when he had left her in the arbour. She had come in while the men were playing billiards, and gone directly to her room, pleading a headache, an excuse which was also made to cover her non-appearance in the morning. The two hours immediately following breakfast passed laboriously, the whole party hanging together with that kind of helpless attraction which characterizes the bubbles in a cup of tea. There was a general sense of relief when the big Panhard purred up the driveway, and Andrew, Radwalader, and Kennedy whirled off in it to Paris. Monsieur and Madame Palfy and the Listers were to follow almost immediately by train, and Mrs. Carnby was talking a continuous stream of the most unmitigated gossip.

"If I had stopped to think that in an hour they would all be gone," she told Jeremy, that night, "I would first have screamed the General Thanksgiving at the top of my lungs, and then had the vapours—whatever they may be!"

It was something the same feeling which had prompted Radwalader to remark, as they rolled away from the villa:

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"I wonder if General Sherman had ever been to a house-party with the Listers when he made that remark about war."

Then, as Andrew made no reply, he relapsed into silence. He possessed that most precious gift of the Gods—the knowledge of when not to talk.

But it was when Andrew was once more alone in his familiar quarters, and had flung himself moodily into a chair, that the full force of his situation returned upon him. In twelve hours the whole world had changed. He realized for the first time that, as a matter of fact, there had never been in his mind the shadow of a doubt that the way lay clear before him, that the attainment of his wishes had been, in his calculations, no more than a matter of time. He had relied upon Margery's constancy like a mariner upon that of the North Star, and it was as if that luminary had suddenly flung away from him into some new and wholly unfamiliar constellation. The man who offers his hand in friendship and is stabbed in reply is not more aghast than was he. He was bitterly hurt, bitterly resentful. He had taken Mrs. Carnby's reprimand as something to which, if it was not wholly deserved, he had at least laid himself open: but that was a very different matter from the scornful and passionate rebuff which he had received from Margery herself. The first had almost afforded him a sense of relief. Like a child who is conscious of some slight transgression, the rebuke had seemed to set things square, to wipe out his fault, and give him absolution and a chance for a fresh start. But what followed, so wholly out of proportion to his knowledge of the truth, left him only conscious of a monstrous and unpardonable injustice. Complete innocence is never so jealous or so resentful as is the half-innocence in which lurks a

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hint of self-accusation, a suspicion of actual guilt. He had stood ready, with a kind of fierce and proud submission, to accept such blame as could be rightly laid at his door, but this very attitude of partial contrition flamed into anger the moment the scale was tipped too far in his disfavour. He did not see that the main factor in his revolt was the same as that in his acceptance of Mrs. Carnby's words—a sense of disloyalty, that is, to what he knew in his heart to be the true and manly course. He was very young, and moreover he had fallen, to at least an appreciable extent, from the high estate of his best ideals. Conscience impelled him to accept with humility as much of censure as he conceived that he deserved, but the savage pride of youth commanded him not to yield a single foot of ground beyond that which, by his folly, he had forfeited. He had been wrong; that he was willing to acknowledge: but his punishment had fallen too suddenly and too hard. Other men had done worse—infinately worse—and had prospered. As for him, it was already too late to turn back. He was learning, albeit rebelliously, that standards of conduct are the boomerangs of the moral armament. The expert may juggle with them with comparative security; but the novice who recklessly flings them into space and then seeks to resume his hold upon them is apt to suffer a rude blow in the attempt. *Facilis descensus*—but the way of retreat is choked with briars and strewn with boulders, and never wholly retraceable.

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Essentially, Andrew Vane was very clean, with an instinctive revulsion from whatever savoured of animalism or sensuality. Among a certain class of men at Harvard he had been called, for a time, "Galahad" Vane; with that impulse to sneer which is irrepressible in those who resent what they find themselves forced to respect. There was something peculiarly appropriate, however, about the name thus bestowed in ridicule: for that fine sense of nicety which is a safeguard more sure than abstract principle had held him instinctively aloof from whatever was simply sordid or unclean. Temptation of the baser sort, which left its furrows on the sand of natures less refined, washed harmlessly over the sturdy rock of his self-respect. The illicit was inseparably associated in his mind with vulgarity. To seek a pleasure which necessitated keeping one eye on the police and the other on one's purse smote him, even in suggestion, with a sickening sense of degradation. He passed by, with the sniff of a thoroughbred terrier, the carrion in which his fellows rolled.

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But it was to this very fastidiousness that Mirabelle had appealed: and because she so fully satisfied it he at first misunderstood the situation utterly. It came to him clothed in a refinement, a daintiness, an atmosphere of soft lights and flowers and *savoir faire et vivre* which spoke eloquently to all that was sensuous in his nature, and stirred nothing of what was merely sensual. That was the French of it. The national deftness which is able to make plain women beautiful, and ordinary viands delicacies, finds its parallel in the national ability to smother the first approach of impropriety in disguises infinitely varied. And Mirabelle herself was more than content not to urge the issue. For the first time in her experience, she was unable to scent an ulterior motive in a man's admiration. She appreciated the simplicity of Andrew's attitude, without fully comprehending its significance. Back of it, no doubt, lay the as yet undeveloped progressions in a routine all too familiar: but she was grateful for the respite.

But a chance word, now and again, had stirred of late the serenity of their curious relation. He put away the thought which forced itself upon him, but it returned invariably, and each time with a suggestion of more eloquent appeal. The subtle influence of Paris, which undermines the bulwarks of principle and prejudice by insensible degrees, was at work. Daily he heard the things which he had instinctively avoided treated as inevitable and by no means unjustified accessories of life; daily the insinuating tooth of epigrammatic banter gnawed at the stability of his former convictions; while the very offences which had always repelled him by their sordid vulgarity were now accomplished all about him, light-heartedly, to the clink of crystal glasses, the soft pulse of waltz music, the ripple of laughter, and the ring of gold. All that is most lavish and most ingenious in the imaginative power and the executive ability of man had been laid under contribution to produce the effect which now enthralled his senses. None of the ordinary restrictions and limitations of life raised a finger to check this pagan prodigality of license. Economy, responsibility, and every more serious consideration stood aside from the path of sovereign pleasure. The world had given of its best with a lavish hand, for here was not only the gold to pay for, but the wit to appreciate, perfection. The labels on these cobweb-covered vintages, the dishes they enhanced, the flowers they rivalled in perfume, the music, the lights, the laughter, all spoke one language—a language forgetful of the past, heedless of the future, but eloquent as the tongue of Circe of the present joy of living. These men and women were civilization's latest work—the best, in the sense of ultra-elaboration, that the experience of the ages had enabled her to accomplish. They had been prodigally dowered with the extremes of sensuous refinement; they were clothed, fed, housed, and diverted by the ultimate attainments of human invention and skill; they demanded that life should be a festival, and every detail of existence the child of a most cunning imagination and a consummate faculty of execution: and this was the spot where was given them what they asked. The goddess of luxury, in whose ears their prayers were poured, and at whose feet their gold was piled, could do no more. They had climbed the capstone of her pyramid, her sun had touched its zenith, and her last word was said!

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So, as Andrew considered his present state, he was aware of the force of Radwalader's remark that in Paris a man had something for which, instead of merely something on which, to live. Life took on a new aspect. In Boston it had been wholesome, monotonous, gray, silver, and brown: in Paris it was heady, infinitely varied, gold, purple, and rose-pink. In another of his fanciful moods, Radwalader had described it as a sapiently ordered dinner: and this, too, now that his eyes were opened, Andrew understood. There were the soups and solid courses—the architecture, history, and artistic associations of the great city: there were, by way of whetting the appetite, the clean little *hors d'œuvres*, radishes, anchovies, and olives—the tea-tables of the Colony, the theatres, the talks with Mrs. Carnby and the women of her set: but there were, as well, the wines and

*sauces piquantes*—the races, the restaurants at midnight, the Allée at noon, and Mirabelle Tremonceau! The beauty and luxury of it all continually charmed his senses; the fever of it stirred hotly in his blood.

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Lately, he had been conscious of noticing things about Mirabelle which had never been part of his analysis of another woman. To him, with one exception, a girl had been a face or a form, to be associated with, or brought back to memory by, a snatch of waltz-music, a perfume, or a particular effect of moonlight on water, or sunlight upon foliage. Margery Palffy was the exception, but it was not she who had taught him the faculty of observation which, of late, he had applied to her. Not from her had he learned to remark details—how the skin crinkled along her nose before a laugh came and after it had gone, how her chin cut in under sharply, and then swelled softly again before it met her throat. Now, for the first time, he was conscious that a woman is never wholly silent—that a whisper of lace or a lisp of silk speaks the movement that is unapparent to the eye. Already he had found that her frown can be mirth-provoking, and her smile of a sadness beyond description. Already he was become weatherwise in his understanding of the ripples of expression blown by the shifting winds of inner thought across her eyes. He knew when she was bored, by the barely perceptible compression of her lower lip, which told of a skilfully smothered yawn; when she was secretly amused, by the little curving line which showed for an instant on either cheek; when she was troubled or puzzled, by the tiniest contraction of her eyebrows. In his recollection dwelt such trifles as the nicking of a full instep by the edge of a slipper, the falling away of lace from a lifted wrist, the sudden swell of rounded muscles beneath the ear when the head is turned aside, and the imprint of pointed nails and the jewels of rings on the fingers of a discarded glove. If he had remembered the noses, eyes, and mouths of other women, his memory now caressed the veins in her wrists, the little wisps of hair low in her neck, the interlinking of her long lashes, the shadow from chin to ear, and the silvering touch of sunlight on the down of her averted cheek. Such things had his study of her taught him. Trifles, all! Yet does a man ever forget that woman, through his intimacy with whom these perceptions were first born, like golden threads newly discovered in the warp and woof of some familiar fabric? And that woman was Mirabelle Tremonceau.

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So it was this—all this—Paris, and her luxury, charm, and infinite, bewildering appeal—with which he had merely toyed, because, at the back of his appreciation, lay ever the thought of what Margery Palffy meant to him, and what he had come to ask of her! What had been his reward? Because he had been neither one thing nor the other he was treated as the outcast he had not dared to be. He had no more than fingered the nettle, instead of grasping it boldly, like a man, and so—it had stung! He had relied, throughout, upon something which did not exist—the loyalty of those for whose sake he had striven to keep himself, in all essentials, clean. When he came to them, prepared to admit his little follies, they had slammed the gate of injustice in his face!

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Of a sudden, the scene in the garden at Poissy leaped back at him, and he rose and began to pace the room. They trusted hearsay, did they? They gossiped about him, each to each, among themselves? They cast him off, as he had been a pariah, without a chance to justify himself, to give them the explanation which he had been ready to offer, but they unprepared to believe? Well, then, they should have their fill! He had tried to enter what he supposed was a friendly port, and had been torpedoed, raked fore and aft at the very haven's mouth, and sent about his business like the veriest privateer. But there *were* friendly harbours! There was still Radwalader—his friend! There was still Mirabelle! How ready they were to believe her guilty, between whom and himself there existed nothing but a friendship wholly pure!

Now, the curious chivalry of youth had him firmly in its grasp—the curious, unreasoning, treacherous chivalry which has not learned to discriminate as yet, but which cloaks its own essential selfishness in a fierce allegiance to the thing of the moment, blind to all larger issues, lance in rest to tilt at windmills, hotly insistent upon the immaterial present, scornful of the future, contemptuous of the past. This girl at whom they were all so eager to cast a stone, this girl who was his friend, and whose only friend he seemed to be—was it not to her that he owed his utmost loyalty, rather than to her who had so readily rejected him upon no better pretence than that of hearsay? Because others refused to grant him the confidence in his integrity which they fully owed him, was that any reason for his proving uncharitable, too?—for siding against Mirabelle and with them?

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Andrew clenched his fingers savagely.

"She is my friend!" he said aloud, "my friend! As for the rest, if they want proof of my depravity, by the Lord they shall have it to the full!"

The Tempter was very near now, glorying in the preliminary moves of Vanity, his stanch ally.

The bell whirred sharply, as Andrew paced the *salon* to and fro, and, a moment later, his servant tapped and entered.

"Well, Jules?"

"*Une dame, monsieur*," announced Vicot suavely, and then—Andrew found her hand in his. There was a suggestion of challenge in her eyes as she lifted them to his, and, before she spoke, her eyebrows went up questioningly and her even white teeth nicked her lower lip.

"You're not angry?"

"Angry?" said Andrew. "Why should I be? I'm surprised, perhaps: I wasn't expecting you. But angry?—no, certainly not. I'm very pleased."

But, for the moment, there was no conviction in his tone. Her coming smote him with a vague uneasiness. It was something new, this—something for which he found himself wholly unprepared. He seemed to divine that a significant development was imminent, and that, in some sense not fully clear, his threshold was a Rubicon—which she had crossed!

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In the *antichambre* Monsieur Vicot was scribbling his master's name and his own initials in the receipt-book of a little, domino-shaped messenger-boy. Then, as young Mercury went whistling down the stairs, he turned the blue missive over and over in his fingers.

"I'll be damned if Radwalader sees it!" he ejaculated, and thrust it in his pocket, where, for a vitally important period, it remained—forgotten!

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## CHAPTER XIII.

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### RHAPSODIE HONGROISE, NO. 2.

"It was a whim, if you like," said Mirabelle, a little unevenly, as she stripped off her gloves. "I hadn't seen you for four whole days, except for that little glimpse at St. Germain, and I was tired, cross, and a little lonely. So I took the chance of your being back and of finding you alone and disengaged. Perhaps, if you've nothing to do, you will let me stay to breakfast. I told Pierre that I would send down word if he was not to wait. Will you ask your man to say so?"

"Certainly."

Andrew touched the bell, gave the message, and, when Jules had gone, stood for a moment by the table fingering his letters. Mirabelle had removed her veil and hat, but was still at the mirror, touching the trifling disarrangement of her hair. Their eyes met in reflection, and suddenly both laughed. Then he went over to her side.

"It's very good to see you again," he said, but with a slight trace of embarrassment in his voice.

Mirabelle gave his shoulder a tiny pat.

"*L'ami!*" she said simply.

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Abruptly her mood changed, and she wheeled upon him, all eager animation.

"So this is your little house, great baby! You must show me everything. It's a picnic, this: we shall be two children. Paris? *Ça n'existe pas! Il n'y a que nous deux au monde!*"

She perched upon the tall fender, swinging her feet, and humming a little tune.

"*Oh, la vie bourgeoisé!*"

Subtly her gaiety infected him, and he laughed again, this time without a hint of embarrassment. This was another Mirabelle, a Mirabelle he had not known. In some unaccountable fashion, her mood stripped her of a decade. She was, in very truth, a child, with a child's light-hearted mirth, a child's shiningly excited eyes, a child's imperious demand to be amused.

They went over the apartment together, pausing for all manner of comment. She took an almost infantile delight in bringing into prim order the chaos of neckties thrown carelessly into an upper drawer; smoothed her golden-bronze hair with his silver-backed brushes; washed her hands at his basin, and flicked the shining drops of water at him from the tips of her slender fingers. She mocked the vanity indicated by a dozen pairs of patent-leathers; tested, with a feigned shudder, the keenness of his razors; simulated a furious jealousy at the discovery of a photograph of Réjane upon his dressing-table; rummaged through the cups and plates and glasses in the *vitrine*; called him, whimsically, *gran'père*, *mon oncle*, and *vieux garçon*; laughed, frowned, scolded, teased, and petted; and was, in short, the incarnation of a gay, reckless, *toi-et-moi-et-vogue-la-galère* femininity.

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Little by little, the charm of her humour gained upon him. To the man in whose life woman has never played a thoroughly intimate part there is something indescribably alluring in her near association with the little details of commonplace existence. Andrew was conscious that, in this independence which he had so lately learned to value, there had been lacking a something which was now, for the first time, supplied. A phrase occurred to him—"the better half." Yes, that was it—the curious inspiration with which an interested, intimately concerned woman infects such sordid items as neckties, cups and saucers. Until then, the main charm of his new manner of life had lain in its sheer independence of all save his personal inclination. Now he was suddenly aware that man's completest happiness relies upon a partial subordination; upon a certain dependence upon another, if still a kindred, point of view. As he watched Mirabelle come and go, as he heard her comments, as he felt the magnetism of her presence, he was smitten with a vast sense of loneliness—with a perception that, in reality, no man is sufficient unto himself. In this first flush of life, in this new enjoyment of Paris the alluring, he felt the need of something more. Was it Margery? Was it Mirabelle? At the moment he could not have told which, if indeed it was either. Once he risked a compliment.

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"How pretty you are! It makes one want to kiss you!"

"Don't!" she said shortly. "Please don't talk like that. It spoils everything."

He drew back to look at her, puzzled, but it seemed that she avoided his eyes.

"Not—not just now," she added. "You don't understand."

Almost immediately, she was laughing and chattering again.

Then came breakfast, and—what is rare even in Paris—a breakfast perfect in its very simplicity. A bisque as smooth as velvet, *sole cardinale* worthy of Frédéric himself, a *casseroles* of chicken, with a salad of celery and peppers, Burgundy tempered to an eighth of a degree, no sweets—but a compensating cup of coffee, *eau de vie de Dantzic*, with its flecks of shattered sunlight

gleaming oddly in the clear liquid, and cigarettes, which Mirabelle refused with a *moue* which hinted at temptation. Andrew toasted her, across the table, with mock ceremony, in the gold-shot *liqueur*.

"It's like your life, *l'amie*," he said, squinting at the last few drops, "smooth and sweet and all spangled with sunshine and gold."

"And soon done with!" added Mirabelle lightly, turning her glass upside down upon the cloth. [208]

She would have him take the largest and most comfortable chair by the window, while she chose the broad, flat sill at his feet. The glare of the sunlight was cut off from them by an awning, but its warmth came pleasurable through. A window-box of narcissus in full bloom breathed a perfume, as deadening as the juice of poppies, on the air. Now and again a cab rattled sharply down the incline of cobbles to the Place d'Iéna, and was blotted abruptly out of hearing on the muffling driveway of the square. For the rest, the world was very still, all distinct noises of the great and restless city being merged into one indeterminate blur of sound.

The curious instinct of silence, which so often gave the hours they spent together their especial character, fell upon them now. Once, as if some disturbing thought had startled her, Mirabelle turned suddenly and touched Andrew's hand, but her own fell back before the gesture was actually complete. The light wind stirred the hair at her temples, and the long scarf of delicate Liberty gauze which she had thrown across her shoulders, and he took up a corner of this and pleated it between his fingers for a time in silence. He was the first to speak.

"Would you care to go out—to the Exposition or the Bois? You'll be saying presently that you've had a stupid afternoon."

Mirabelle shook her head, with a faint smile, and then altered her position, drawing up her feet and linking her fingers across her knees. The change brought her close to the arm of his chair, and she looked up at him long and steadily, and then shook her head again. [209]

"No," she answered, "I shall not say that. The Exposition? The Bois? I suppose there *are* such things, but I'd forgotten them. I like it here. I am happy."

With that strange new understanding of his, it was not alone her smile which he noticed, but the slow, irregular fall of her eyelids, and the deepening of a tiny shadow when the lashes rested on her cheek. An atmosphere for which he was at a loss to account seemed always to envelop him when he came into this girl's presence. He was conscious of the same not unpleasant languor which had come upon him on that first afternoon in her *salon*, after the return from Auteuil, but now it was not due, as then, to drowsiness. Rather, it was a blotting out of every consideration save that he was with her. America, Poissy, even Paris, humming there below them, seemed to belong to another world, and that in which he was living for the moment, to be made up of sunlight, and silence, and perfume.

"I'm almost sorry," he said presently, "that you came."

The girl made no reply. A singular change, which was not movement, seemed to stiffen and straighten her. Without actually altering, her position lost its grace, its ease, its assurance. Staring straight away before her, her eyes forgot to wink. Her whole bearing was that of an animal warned by the crackle of a trodden twig of some peril imminent and vital. [210]

"I'm sorry you felt that you *could* come," continued Andrew. "I've not had much experience of life, and it's not for me to question you. But we've been good friends. I wish it could have remained that way. Young as I am, I've had disappointments—bitter ones. The people I thought I could trust—"

"*Andrew!*"

She had never called him by his name before. At the word, a curious little thrill stirred in him, and he closed his eyes, his mouth tightening at the corners.

"Forgive me," he added, in a whisper.

"Is it possible," said Mirabelle slowly, "that all this time you—*haven't known?*"

"I've tried not to know," he answered. "I've tried not to listen to what people said. It has all been so different from anything like that. You've been like the girls I know in my own country, like a comrade, like a chum. I've tried to keep myself from thinking of you in any other light. I've always been glad to be with you: yes, and I'm glad to have you with me now. And yet—I know that we shall both be sorry for this. To-morrow—"

"*To-morrow!*"

Misunderstanding, she turned to him, and slipped her hand into his. A moment she hesitated, and then bowed her face against his arm. [211]

"Then you *do* know!" she continued. "Ah, my friend, I have hoped that it would not come to this."

Her voice had suddenly gone wistful. She was the child again, but the child hurt, penitent, and near to tears.

"Believe me, *l'ami*, I hoped it would not come to this. I'm so careless, Andrew. I don't think—I forget. You see, we are different, *nous autres*. What are little things to other women are great things to us, and what are great things to them—"

Then she looked into his eyes. Almost unconsciously, her fingers touched his arm.

"I wish I could make you understand," she added. "Even with me, there is only one thing that can justify—"

She paused for a breath, with a gesture toward the open window.

"It was to get away from all that that I came—to forget—to be alone with you—just we together

—two children—to have something different. I'm so tired of it all, Andrew—and—there has never been any one like you. I didn't think what it would mean. Ah, my friend—"

She sank back upon the cushion, with a little sigh.

Suddenly Andrew's heart contracted, seemed to mount into his throat, and, repulsed, beat wildly against the bars of its prison. He felt the tremor of its pulsing in his wrists, in his temples, in his ears. He knew that he was colouring deeply. He strove to tighten his lips, but they parted in spite of him, and the breath shot through with a little hiss. Then he came to himself, and saw that the girl's eyes had closed, and that her hand on the arm of the chair had gripped the silken scarf. Folds of it, sharpened to the thinness of paper, came out between her fingers, and her knuckles showed like little bosses of tinted ivory through the pink flesh.

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What was it? The hand of a passing spirit, wholly unfamiliar, had touched him; a voice never heard before had whispered something in his ear. What was it—what was this thing which he understood and did not understand? Bending slightly forward, he looked down through the ironwork railing at the street below. A solitary cab leaned maudlinly over the kerb, the driver slewed around in his seat, with his elbow on the roof, and his varnished hat on the back of his head, reading a newspaper; and the horse nodding, with his nose in a feed-bag. Two children were marching resolutely, hand in hand and out of step, their nurses following, with the gay plaid ribbons of their caps flapping about their hips. The pipe of an itinerant plumber whined and squeaked unmelodiously, and the horn of a passing automobile hiccupped in the distance. Inconsequently there came to Andrew the memory of a sudden awakening from a nap on the beach at Newport. For a moment, everything in sight—people, houses, boats, the sand, the sunlight, and the sea—had been garbed in startling unreality, in a new, strange light.

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The restlessness of a curious dissatisfaction suddenly laid hold upon him, and he rose and began to pace the *salon* once more. He would have given something to fling himself out of the chaos of conflicting thoughts which beset him, to ride, for example, five miles at a gallop, as he had been wont to do at Beverly, with the wind tearing at his hair and a thoroughbred lunging between his knees.

Presently he became aware that Mirabelle was watching him curiously, and was puzzled to find that for the first time he was not ready to meet her eyes. He seated himself at the piano, and for a moment fingered the music on the rack, without actually taking in the title—"Rhapsodie Hongroise, No. 2." Then he smiled, with a little nod as if he had been greeting an acquaintance on the street, and his hands fell upon the keys.

Majestically, with ponderous bass notes and a deeper comment of short, staccato chords, the Rhapsodie began. It was as solemn as a dirge in its adagio movement, till the high treble began to flutter into the *motif*, and dragged it upward, with a brilliant run, into a suggestion of running water. Plunging again into the bass, the music marched firmly on, varied with higher chords, until, through the monotonous throb, a bird chirped, twittered, and trilled, and cadenza followed cadenza, plashing in and over the main theme. This variation was presently gone again in a swiftly descending arpeggio, and the adagio reasserted itself, beating out across the *salon* with the lingering quality of tolled bells, freeing itself at last by another run into the crystal sparkle of the treble, where the *motif* was repeated, ringing with fresh vigour. The bass replied with a brief word now and again, correcting the new rendering of the air that it had taught, or patiently repeating a whole phrase. But, petulantly, the treble threw off the sombre spirit of what had gone before. Again it thrilled with bird-music, and ran into the gay babble of brooks, punctuated rarely by a deeper chord, as if the water swerved round a stone, and slid, murmuring, across a level, before swinging again down a shelving reach. But, almost immediately, a new element stole in—a tremulous flutter of one note, potently suggestive of mad music to follow. Faster—faster! The flutter was interrupted by a dripping of stray notes, an octave lower, dotted, presently, with a tiny tinkling above. Then, without warning, the whole plunged into a mad *vivace* movement, that galloped like a living thing, was interrupted by whimsically coupled notes, gabbling up and down, and then seemed to lengthen and bound forward as if it had been spurred. There was a thunder of chromatics—hoofs pounding on a long bridge—then the tinkle of water broke in again—right at his elbow—lingered briefly, and was gone, and the hoofs were thudding on a muffling stretch of soft road. The suggestion, at first merely a fancy, grew upon him as he played. This was the gallop of which he had felt a need! He could almost see the wiry mare snapping in the wind, smell the horse and the saddle, and hear the stirrup-leathers squeaking against his boots. In spirit, at least, he put into the music the exultation, which is near to delirium, of a ride at nightfall or at dawn. The earth, which never sighs save when falling asleep or waking, sighs then, and her breath is sweet. Scents and sounds step to the roadside, and are gone again in a moment. The wind whips and whistles. And the triplicate hoof-beats pound, pound, pound out of life all that is stale, morbid, and unclean, so that it becomes a crystal dome inverted on a perfume-breathing garden, and one man whirling through space like a god, with a laugh on his lips!

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Hurdles rushed at Andrew out of the music, and he rose to them, and, clearing them, would have shouted, but that the music shouted for him. He felt the familiar shock of landing, the infinitesimal pause before the recover, and then—away, away! It was life, youth, the surge and hammer of red blood through every vein, the certainty of strength and the sovereignty of success, the ineffable wine of life, filling the cup to the brim, and splashing over into the sunlight, in drops like rubies sheathed in silver.

As suddenly as it had begun, the mad, blood-stirring gallop was over. The stream tinkled and was still. The *motif* was repeated softly, incompletely, as if regretfully, in adagio, then paraphrased in a brilliant staccato movement, which mounted, plunged madly down from treble to bass, hesitated, and whipped out of existence in a group of crashing chords.

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"I never knew you could play like that!"

Mirabelle had risen, and come across to the piano, and the words were spoken in a voice barely above a whisper. The room seemed to Andrew to be closing in around him, and out of its dwindling distance floated her face, more beautiful than he had ever seen it, but very pale and with eyes wide and startled. He did not answer directly. Thoughts as confused as the wisps of a dream but half recalled went racing through his brain. For an instant he strove to control himself, strove to remember, strove to forget. Then, as it were, a great tide of oblivion to all but the intoxication of the moment swept down upon him.

"You said," he began, "that only one thing could justify—What is it? What did you mean?"

He stood up as he spoke, came quite close to her, and took her hands.

"What did you mean?" he repeated. "Tell me—Mirabelle."

As she did not speak, he took her hand and drew her toward him, with a kind of dull wonder in his eyes. What he saw in hers he had never seen in a woman's before—a mist not wholly moisture, and tenderer than tears.

"Mirabelle!"

"*Je t'aime!*" she murmured. "*Je t'adore!*"

She would have drawn back, but he took her in his arms. From the gold-bronze hair which touched his cheek came a faint perfume, and through the thin silk he could feel the hammer of her heart. So for a long moment he held her, with his lips on hers. It was like kissing a rose—a rose that smelt of orris.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### FATE IS HARD—CASH!

As Andrew took his mail from the hand of Jules one afternoon, some three weeks later, his eye was caught by a packet directed in the precise script of old Mr. Sterling, and this, together with a letter in the same hand, he separated from the mass of other material, and gave his immediate attention. There had grown in him a singular craving for all that could remind him of his life at home. As he slit the envelope, a draft upon his bankers came first to his hand, and he glanced at it, with a short whistle, before laying it on the desk. It was for fifteen thousand francs.

Mr. Sterling's letter, a model of prim penmanship, ran as follows:

"MY DEAR ANDY: I have yours of the 12th inst., and am gratified to learn that Paris is surpassing your expectations. Although it is a city not ordinarily recommended as a sojourning-place for young men, I have seen enough of the world to know that it is not the surroundings which are significant, so much as the temperament of the individual placed among them. If you were inclined to dissipation, you would manufacture, if not find, it in a one-horse prohibition town in one of the back counties of Maine: and if you were otherwise disposed, not Paris itself would be competent to prove your undoing. So I am not averse to your project of remaining until Christmas. I have great confidence in you. If you will look back, you will realize that I have not burdened you with advice since the days when it was necessary to warn you against over-indulgence in ice-cream, or send you away from the breakfast-table for a more effective application of the nail-brush. That has been because I have seen in you something which I believe to be a guarantee against your ever falling into any misdoing which would be a discredit to the name you bear. I mean the fine healthiness of mind which eschews by instinct whatever is 'common or unclean'. You will have your fling, as I had mine, and as it is right you should. You will learn for yourself the lessons which no one else can teach you; but I think your attitude will always be that of a gentleman. There are ways and ways of doing things—even of sowing wild oats—and among these are the way of the gentleman and the way of the fool. You have never been the latter, and I have no reason to believe you will begin now.

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"Among the commonest formulas of parental advice is that which exhorts a young man never to do or say anything which a mother or sister could not hear: and this deserves, to my way of thinking, just about the amount of attention which it ordinarily receives. I know the type of man whom you have always chosen, and, in all likelihood, always will choose, as a friend: and if you will avoid doing anything which you would be ashamed to tell that kind of man, I shall be satisfied.

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"As you wish to remain in Paris for some time longer, and as Paris is preëminently a city where money is a *sine qua non*, I am disposed not only to approve your plan, but to make it possible of execution, with a certain degree of liberality. You should know, if you do not know already, that I have made you my heir. When I am obliged to shuffle off this mortal coil, you will come into something over eighty thousand a year. There are responsibilities attached to such an income, and not the least of them is the knowledge of the social obligation which it imposes. There is nothing more deplorable than the spectacle of a young man squandering what he can't afford to spend, unless it be that of an old one grudging what he can. While far from counselling wanton extravagance, I wish you to form those habits of generosity and open-heartedness

which your position makes incumbent upon you. Repay with liberality the courtesies extended to you; and keep on the credit, rather than the debit, side of the social account. Take your share of the legitimate pleasures of life as well, paying as you go.

"To the letter of credit given you on your departure, which provided for a possible expenditure of a thousand dollars a month for the six months of your contemplated stay, I now add a draft for fifteen thousand francs (F. 15,000), to cover the additional three months during which you propose to remain. In view of this, you will not think me unreasonable in foregoing the customary remittance for a much smaller sum upon your birthday.

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"That birthday is still somewhat more than three months distant, but a present which I had contemplated making you on the occasion, being already completed, I am forwarding it by this mail, with my best wishes and affection. It is a miniature of your mother—whom it is your greatest misfortune never to have known—painted, from a photograph, by Cavigny-Maupré during his recent visit to Boston: and it is appropriate that you should have it at a time when you are absent—with sincere regret, as you please me by saying—from the grim old house where you have been an unspeakable comfort to, and where awaits you an affectionate welcome from,

"Your grandfather,

"ANDREW STERLING.

"*Andrew Sterling Vane, Esq., Paris, France.*"

"Dear old man!" said Andrew to himself, with a little smile of affection, before laying the letter aside. "Dear, generous old man!" Then he turned to the package which contained the portrait of his mother.

Cavigny-Maupré had excelled himself in this the most recent in his long series of masterly miniatures. The tranquil and beautiful face of Helen Vane, as it had been before the blight of disillusion dimmed its ethereal sweetness, looked out at Andrew with serene and steadfast eyes. There was no attempt at striking colouring, no trick of effect. The artist, with the instinct which never played him false, had aimed to preserve the touch of simplicity, of girlishness, which the old photograph had given him as his cue. The result was a singularly appealing beauty, which his more ambitious productions, with all their emphatic brilliancy, utterly lacked. Before he could have analyzed the impulse which prompted him, Andrew had touched his lips to the picture, and in the act of performing this simple homage his fine eyes grew moist. For this was his mother—the pale, gentle-eyed dream-mother he had never seen, but who had given her life for his, and who, perhaps, with the searching vision of the immortals, was watching him wistfully from beyond the immeasurably distant stars!

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So, at the dinner-hour, Radwalader found him—sunk deep in his chair, with his eyes half-closed, and the miniature in his hand.

"Hello!" he said. "Come in."

"You look like a drawing by Gibson," observed Radwalader lightly, "over the title 'Day Dreams' or 'A Face from the Past,' or something of the sort. The old, old story, eh, Vane? Mooning over the loved one's portrait?"

"Not a bad guess," replied Andrew, somewhat gravely, as he rose, and tendered Radwalader the picture.

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"That was my mother," he added.

"Oh, I *beg* your pardon!" exclaimed Radwalader, with that ready assumption of contrition wherewith he contrived so skilfully to repair his infrequent *faux pas*.

"No harm done," answered Andrew. "Are you engaged for dinner? I've ordered a table at Armenonville, and meant to send Jules over to your place to ask you, but the time has gone faster than I thought. Gad! it's almost seven. I *have* been mooning, in good earnest. Will you go?"

"With pleasure. I dropped in on the chance that you might have nothing to do."

Radwalader laid the miniature on the table.

"It's a very beautiful face," he added. "I wonder if I ever saw her. It's not impossible. I remember meeting your grandfather in Boston."

"You'd hardly have met my mother, though. She died when I was born—twenty years ago. You'd have been quite a boy."

"A boy well out of knickerbockers, then! You flatter me, Vane. Is it possible that you don't know I'm tottering on the ragged edge of fifty?"

"One wouldn't believe it, then. Come in while I brush up a bit."

He led the way into the bedroom, and Radwalader, following, applied himself to the consumption of a cigarette. For three weeks he had been observing Andrew with a new attention. He was always quick to note symptoms, but in the present instance he found himself, to his surprise, unable to analyze them with his accustomed readiness. The change which he saw was singularly subtle, albeit as pronounced as that which a separation of years might have enabled him to perceive. It was with difficulty that he could bring himself to believe that barely a day had gone by without their meeting. It seemed impossible that Andrew had not gone and come again, passing, in the interim, through some vastly significant experience. Radwalader found him less open, while habited with a new assurance; less enthusiastic, while subject at times to an almost feverish gaiety; more alive to the minutest details of the new life which surrounded him, but with a tendency to scoff replacing his former merely boyish interest. There were times when Radwalader would have called him unqualifiedly happy; others when there was no such thing as

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believing him otherwise than wretched. He was thinner, smiled less than formerly, and took for granted much which had thitherto excited his eager comment, his amusement, or his dislike. Over all he wore a new reserve, a worldliness beyond his years. In all this, while there was much which Radwalader did not fully understand, there was much which he had expected, much which he had deliberately planned His cards had long since been dealt and sorted. Now he chanced a lead.

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"I was at Poissy yesterday."

"Ah?"

Andrew appeared in the doorway of the bathroom, diligently towelling his head. As he looked up, his eyes, so curiously like Radwalader's own, were not less coolly non-committal than they.

"How is Mrs. Carnby?" he added.

"A good bit out of patience with you, I gather," said Radwalader. "You've pretty well deserted her of late, haven't you?"

Andrew was drying his fingers, one by one, with somewhat exaggerated attention.

"One can't serve God and Mammon," he observed, with that new flippancy of his. "I won't stoop to the pettiness of fencing with you, Radwalader. You're not blind, I take it. You must know as well as I why I don't want to go to Poissy, and why, if I did, they wouldn't care to have me."

"Yes," said the other, "I suppose I do. If I didn't, it wouldn't be for lack of hearing you talked about. Gossip is tolerably busy with your name, these days."

"Gossip is rarely busy with *one* name," retorted Andrew dryly.

"Obviously. I didn't mean to ignore Mademoiselle Tremonceau: as you say, a lack of candour between us would be merely petty: but I wasn't quite sure how far you were prepared to concede me the license of a friend. These are ticklish subjects, even between intimates. I'm not inclined to meddle, but I've thought more than once of asking you if you thought the game worth while."

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"I make a point of not thinking about it, one way or another," said Andrew. "Why should I? I've youth, health, money, the sunshine, Paris—and her. Why should I think? It's nobody's business but my own. Don't be a prig, Radwalader."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Radwalader. "I see I've been mistaken. I had an idea that it *was* somebody's business, other than yours—very much so, in fact. Of course, if it isn't—"

He stopped abruptly, and made a little signal of warning. An instant later Monsieur Vicot entered the room, and began to lay out Andrew's evening dress. His presence was an effective check upon further conversation along the direct line they had been pursuing, and, as Andrew hurried through his dressing, Radwalader plunged into generalities.

In another fifteen minutes Vicot opened the apartment door for them, and, as they passed out, closed it and stepped into the *salon*. The first object which met his eye was the miniature of Helen Vane, lying, face downward, on the table where Radwalader had left it. He picked it up and set it, upright, on the mantel, under the brilliant light of an electric bulb. Then, idly curious, he leaned forward and stared at it.

In the soft gloom of the July evening Armenonville glittered and twinkled among the trees, and flung handfuls of shivered light on the wind-ruffled waters of the little lake. As they approached, they had a glimpse of tables brilliant with spotless napery and sheen of crystal and silver, and of heavy-headed roses leaning from tall and slender vases. Solicitous waiters, grotesquely swaddled in their aprons, were turning every wine-glass to a ruby or a topaz with the liquid light of Bourgogne or Champagne. Electric lights glowed pink in roses of crinkled silk. The Pavilion was a veritable fairy palace, as unstable, to all appearance, and as gossamer-light as the fabric of a dream swung miraculously within a luminous haze.

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The table reserved for them was in an elbow of the piazza and so, a little apart from the others; and the *maître d'hôtel* led them toward it with an air which was hardly less impressive than a *fanfare*. It was his business to remember the faces of young foreigners who thundered up at midday in twenty-horse-power Panhards expressly to command a table, and incidentally to tip him a louis. Moreover, there was Radwalader—Radwalader, who knew by his first name every *maître d'hôtel* from Lavenue's to the Rat Mort, and from Marguery's to the Pavillon Bleu, called Frédéric himself "*mon vieux*," and sent messages to the *chef* at Voisin's or the Café Riche, informing him for whom the order was to be prepared.

Among the things which Andrew had unconsciously assimilated from Radwalader, was something very nearly equalling the latter's instinct for ordering a dinner. It was that, even more than the louis or the Panhard, which inspired respect in the supercilious mind of the *maître d'hôtel*. So they had caviar, sharpening the twang of their halves of lemon with a dash of tabasco; and *langouste à l'Américaine*, with a hint of tarragon in the mayonnaise; venison, with a confection of ginger, marmalade, and currant jelly, which not every one gets, even for the asking, at the Pavilion d'Armenonville; a salad of split Malaga grapes and hearts of lettuce; and a Camembert cheese, taken at the flood—the which, in Camembert, is of as good omen as that in the affairs of men.

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Around them the brilliantly-illuminated tables were filled with diners. The true Parisian *monde*, long since departed for Aix or Hombourg, had given place to the annual influx of foreigners and the lighter spirits of the half-world, men and women both. Here were minds which skidded from subject to subject with the eccentricity of water-spiders on a roadside pool. The latest comedies, the latest fashions, the latest scandals—they came and went, verbal drops sliding over the acute edge of conversation, each touched with prismatic hues of humour, irony, or cynicism. The hum of chat was a patchwork of English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, and Italian. Europe was talking—talking the gossip of the day—pouring it like liquid silver into the moulds of many

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languages, wherefrom it took the oddest forms of epigram.

Here and there, members of the American Colony were entertaining friends from the States, arrived that afternoon from Calais, Cherbourg, or Le Havre, with the odour of bilge-water yet in their nostrils, and the *terra*, misnamed *firma*, rocking unpleasantly under their senses. At an adjoining table, a huge American collegian, labouring heavily against the head-wind of many cocktails, addressed his waiter:

"Ziss my las' night 'n Paruss, gassun. Jer know w'a' I've done t' Paruss? Ziss w'a' I've done t' Paruss."

He made the gesture of one wringing a half of lemon, and casting it contemptuously aside, and looked up, proudly, for approval. Later he would be tenderly removed—"a river ark on the ocean brine."

But these—the transient Americans—were the least significant factors in the scene. They had come to prey, and would go away to scoff. They were a grade above the herded tourists to whose understanding the Colonne Vendôme is an edifice closed for fear of suicides; but among them were women who would write books on Paris, upon the strength of three months' residence and six letters of introduction, and men whose diligence in exhuming the most sordid evidences of metropolitan degradation would enable them to speak, thenceforward, with authority upon French depravity—the Hams, Tartuffes, and Parkhursts of their hour. Paris finds time to smile at many such. Over and around them flowed the smooth current of Parisian *savoir vivre* which they could not hope to understand, still less to emulate.

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"I feel," said Andrew slowly, "as if I had lived here all my life. Do you remember telling me, that day at Auteuil, that things one ordinarily disregards in America are part of one's education in Paris? I've learned the truth of that. I don't think I should be apt to mistake *cerise* for red, as things are now."

"Did you ever think of the irony of these *toilettes de demi-mondaine*?" asked Radwalader, looking from one to another of the superb gowns at the neighbouring tables. "You know, they're society's fashions of the day after to-morrow. I wonder what our dear lady of the Parc Monceau, or Mayfair, or Fifth Avenue, or Back Bay, or Nob Hill, would say if she knew the source of that trick of sleeve, or that contrast of *entre-deux*, which she fondly imagines was born in the mind of a Doucet for her and her alone. It came into being, my dear Vane, in a stuffy, overfurnished little apartment in one of the suburbs, as a *patron* of questionable merit by a charming creature with more ideas than reputation, and was first worn at the little Mathurins—or here—by Ninon Gyrienne: at a theatre where my lady would not be seen, by a woman whom she would not receive! Or, if not that, La Girofla stood sponsor for it at Deauville or Monte Carlo, and was duly complimented in the *potins of Gil Blas*. *Quelle farce, mon Dieu!*"

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The two men were eating at the leisurely rate which is the most invaluable lesson Paris teaches the American. Andrew's lips curled in a little sneer.

"It's all a farce," he said, "and, God knows, I'm the biggest mountebank of them all. When I look back six weeks, it's another Andrew Vane I see—a better one."

"But not a happier one, I fancy," suggested Radwalader.

"Why not? Do you think, after all your experience, that Paris brings happiness? Distraction, perhaps—amusement—knowledge—but happiness? Oh no!"

He looked down, appearing to reflect, and then went on in another tone:

"I've been meaning to have a little talk with you, Radwalader, and what we were saying, back there at the apartment, seemed to open the way. I'm going to be pretty frank, and, on the score of friendship, I hope you'll be the same."

Radwalader nodded, narrowing his eyes.

"It's about Mirabelle Tremonceau. Believe me or not as you will, it was all innocent enough at first. She was something new in my life, something entirely new. I can't say I fell in love with her. There were reasons why that wasn't possible at the time; but I found her beautiful, amusing, and the soul of kindness. I liked her, and—well, I drifted along from day to day, without any particular plan, one way or another. It may seem incredible that I thought her like any other girl I knew, but I did. I suppose it's not an especially novel story—Paris and the young American."

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"Goliath and David," commented Radwalader.

"Exactly—except that David won out, and I haven't. I began to hear things, but, even so, I continued to like her, and to go there. I didn't half believe what I heard, in the first place: it was all so different—the surroundings and all that—from anything I'd ever known. There wasn't a sign of anything of the sort, as far as I could see; and I was more sorry for her than anything else, when I finally caught on. I had the kind of feeling one has for a chap that's being overhazed at college. Everybody was damning her, and all the time she was treating me as her friend—and nothing more. I felt that it was up to me to stick up for her, and I did—even when Mrs. Carnby chimed in, and told me I was acting like a fool. You see—"

He hesitated, fingering his fork, and appearing to reflect.

"I said I'd talk straight with you," he added, "and I will. There was only one person whose opinion made any difference to me, and I felt I could trust her all through. I dodged the question when you spoke of it, back there, but of course you were right. It was somebody's business—Margery Palffy's. I'd been as good as engaged to her for a year—that is, *she* knew and *I* knew—and it never dawned upon me that she was going to think anything except—well, *that!* You see, I knew I hadn't done anything wrong, and I went to her, as bold as brass, that last night when we were all at Poissy, and asked her definitely. You can imagine how I felt when she came back at me with—I don't need to tell you what she said. It was the same old business that other people

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had been hinting at, but it was straight from the shoulder, and showed me that she thought I was as unworthy of her as a man could well be—as unworthy of her as I am now! It was the worst kind of a facer. It drove me mad, Radwalader—I want you to remember, all the time, that I didn't deserve it—and I flung away from her, with every drop of my damnable pride at the boiling-point, and came back to Paris, and—to the inevitable. For three weeks I've been living in heaven—and in hell!"

"In heaven," said Radwalader quietly, "because of Mirabelle; and in hell because of—"

"That's it—because of Margery Palffy! Try to understand me. If I thought I loved her before, I *know* it now. If it were possible to go back—but it isn't—it's never possible to do that. It's too late, that's all there is about it."

Radwalader smiled easily. The cards were running his way now.

"Surely, you're not tied up as tight as that," he said. "You've been a trifle hot-headed, yes; but in all you've told me, there's nothing more than what a vast majority of the men you know have done, and nothing more than what a vast majority of women have forgiven and forgotten. It's never too late to mend. Cut loose, my dear Vane—cut loose from Mirabelle, and go back to the girl you really care for. You'll have to deny a few things, of course, and swallow some humiliation; but don't get tragic over it. In affairs like this, the first course is humble-pie, but the *pièce de résistance* is invariably fatted calf!"

"Cut loose from Mirabelle," repeated Andrew. "Cut loose from Mirabelle?"

"Obviously. There's one infallible way, my friend."

Radwalader raised his right hand lightly, and chafed with his thumb the tips of his first and second fingers.

"Money?" demanded Andrew.

"Of course! And you may thank your stars that you're in a position to command it. Many a chap has gone under because he couldn't pay the piper when the bill came in. You can; and there's no reason under heaven why you should let this matter trouble you. Wait a moment!"—as Andrew was about to speak—"let me explain. I'm not the sort that cuts into other people's affairs as a rule. I detest meddling, and ordinarily I don't want to be bothered with what doesn't concern me. But I like you, Vane—I do, heartily. I'd be more sorry than a little to see you in trouble. What's more, I feel to a certain extent responsible, as I was the one to introduce you. Well, then—suppose you leave the whole affair to me. I know the world, and especially Paris, and more especially Mirabelle Tremonceau. Leave it in my hands. Even if she's ugly about it, I can probably get you out, all clear, for fifteen or twenty thousand francs, where it might cost you fifty if you undertook to engineer the thing yourself. What do you say?"

"Say?" repeated Andrew, with a little, mirthless laugh, "why, simply that you don't understand. Mirabelle wouldn't accept money from me."

"Oh, not money, like that," said Radwalader, "not money out of a purse—'one, two, three, *and* two make five. I think that's correct, madam, and thank *you!*' No, I grant you—probably she wouldn't. But a Panhard, or a deposit at her bankers', or diamonds—that would be different."

"No—no," said Andrew, shaking a single finger from side to side. "You're all wrong. You don't get the situation at all. When a woman loves a man—"

"Love?" broke in Radwalader. "Piffle! Leave it to me, my dear sir, and in twenty-four hours I'll prove to you that Mirabelle Tremonceau's spelling of the word 'love' begins with the symbol for pounds sterling!"

"And Margery?" faltered Andrew.

"I saw Miss Palffy at Poissy," said Radwalader. "She's still staying there, you know. Now, if you'd told me that *she* loved you, I'd have believed you. She was looking wretchedly, I thought."

He paused for a moment, to give the words their proper effect, and then played his highest card.

"Did you receive a telegram from her after you left Poissy?"

Andrew stared blankly at him, moistening his lips.

"A telegram?" he said. "A telegram?"

"I thought you didn't," replied Radwalader, "and told her so. It seems she sent one, and was surprised you hadn't answered."

"A telegram!" said Andrew again. "Do you realize what that means, Radwalader? Why, it would have made all the difference in the world! A telegram? No, of course I never received it! And I've been—I've been—"

His voice broke suddenly.

"My God! Radwalader, but fate is hard!"

"Fate, in this instance," remarked Radwalader, "*is* hard—hard cash. Don't let any false quixotism blind you to that, Vane. I've shown you the way out. Think it over, and when you're ready, come to me."

He crumpled his napkin, and rose. He had played. Now it was for Mirabelle to trump the trick.

The two men separated at the Porte Maillot, Radwalader strolling away in the direction of the Métropolitain entrance with a readily fabricated excuse about a card engagement. He understood to perfection the action of moral leaven—that, once introduced as an ingredient, it must not be unduly stirred, but left, with the fair white cloth of unconcern drawn smoothly over it, to work its will at ease. To a greater extent even than Mrs. Carnby, he possessed the instinct for not saying too much. He left Andrew to reflect upon what had passed between them, confident of its effect.

Andrew paused at the junction of the Avenues de Malakoff and de la Grande Armée, the confusion and glare of the great thoroughfares smiting fretfully upon his instant need of reflection, and then returned upon his tracks, seeking the cool quiet of the Bois. After a short walk past the brightly lighted Chalet du Touring Club, a by-path tempted him, and he turned aside. At once the forest closed in upon him, and the scene of a half-hour before became more than ever like a phase in some fantastic and uneasy dream. At Armenonville there had been a blaze of light and a ripple of laughter, which barred out the stars of heaven as if they had never been: here was a world of stillness and of shadow, broken only by the distant music of the tziganes, and, through the interstices of tree-trunks and foliage, the intermittent gleam of bicycle and automobile lanterns on the Route de la Porte des Sablons. The faintly pungent odour of moss rose to his nostrils, as in some deep, undiscovered retreat in a provincial preserve. The small, sweet twitter of a restless bird pricked the delicious silence like the sound of a rip in thin linen. The tziganes at Armenonville were playing the "Valse Bleue." The air, pulsing softly through the gloom, seemed almost to speak the words:

"*Pourquoi ne pas m'aimer, p'isqu' tu sais que je t'ai—ai—me?*"

"Margery!" said Andrew slowly, to himself. "Margery—Margery!"

In the three weeks just past, he had been building a new world, a world from which his former ideals had been deliberately banished, and wherein new standards of conduct had been set. Pride, recklessness, and resentment had been the triumvirate by which this moral state was governed, and he had obeyed their dictates blindly, without caring, as he had told Radwalader, to think. Left to itself, this might have endured indefinitely, even as the larger world, with all its codes and creeds, established by the limited experience of the men inhabiting it. But what would be effected by the abrupt entrance into society of a messenger from another planet, infinitely wiser, infinitely more advanced, was brought to pass by Radwalader's words. The *status quod* reeled on its foundations. The alternative which Andrew had accepted, and which had dulled, if not actually done away with, the acuteness of his disappointment, now appeared in its true light as the veriest sham, a sedative worse than useless—enervating—stupefying—poisonous. The bare suggestion was enough. Not for a moment did he doubt the significance of this message which had never reached him. It could mean but one thing—forgiveness and recall. All there had been to say upon the other count, had been said in that half-hour in the arbour. Her hand had been stretched out to stay him from the precipice down which he had plunged—stretched out too late! The knowledge tore in an instant the mask from his vanity, and he stood confessed—a coward. What was it she had said? "A fancy so trivial and so idle that it could not even hold you back from transgression." And he had resented that, resented it only to furnish proof, when the actual temptation came, that it was true!

He knew himself now for what he was. How scornful he had been of these accusations, how certain of himself, how small in that great loyalty of his which stood for nothing, how ready to believe himself infallible! The merest profligate of those whose follies he had despised in other days, was no weaker, in the end, than he. He looked up blindly to where the stars winked faintly through the lace-like foliage, and cursed the distant roar of Paris which came dully to his ears. Paris—Circe! and he no better than the transformed comrades of Ulysses! He was a coward—a fraud—a sham; he found himself, in this moment of bitter self-reproach, untrue even to the flimsy conception of duty which, when it put him to the test, he had debauched. He thought of Mirabelle, and in thinking hated her! With all her beauty, all her perfect mimicry of breeding, all the little significant hints of colour and perfume with which she so skilfully clothed with charm whatever pertained to her, she had never struck below his ready appreciation of whatever was suggestive of refinement and eloquent of femininity. It was her novelty which had principally charmed him, but novelty is the butterfly of the sensations—the most brilliant, the shortest-lived of these emotional ephemera. Mrs. Carnby had struck the key-note in her cool analysis of the *demi-monde*: "These women don't wear. They seem to be only plated with fascination, and in time the plating wears off, and you come back to the kind with the hall-mark."

Now the scales fell from Andrew's eyes, and he knew that what she had said was true. Compared to Margery—the Margery he had loved and lost, what was this Mirabelle to whom he had yielded her place? Beautiful, yes! But the perception of beauty, like beauty's self, lies only skin-deep. Now, with Radwalader's suggestion that the way of retreat lay open, came the reaction, inevitable in such a nature as Andrew Vane's, from an emotion purely extrinsic. He was tired of her. The plating had worn off.

Suddenly he remembered that he had promised to see her that night, and, with an abrupt perception of the opportunity thus offered, he pulled himself together, and swung off rapidly toward the Porte Dauphine. As he walked, inhaling the fragrance of the evening air, a new sanity seemed to descend on him. He promised himself that this should be the end. However the effect was to be accomplished, he was determined to break the relation, kindly but firmly, and at whatever risk to regain, if not his self-esteem, at least his freedom. As to what should follow, he did not care—or dare—to ask. The unknown significance of the lost message soothed him like an irrational caress. Was it too late? Is it *ever* "too late to mend"? He neither knew nor cared. Given

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his freedom, he would chance the rest. Fate was hard. A thought checked him. "Fate is hard—cash!"

"Whatever I believe," he told himself, "I don't believe that." And then, in the illogical manner of man, added: "I don't care what it costs me—this is the end!"

He found Mirabelle in a corner of her great divan, and the room softly illumined. She wore a bewitchingly dainty lounging-gown of iridescent silk, in the folds of which peacock-blues and greens played and rippled into each other in constant com-minglings. [242]

"*Embrasse-moi*," she said, looking up at him.

She glanced at him curiously as he straightened himself again and dropped upon the cushions at her feet. In a woman, the manner of a kiss performs the midwife's office to the beginnings of clairvoyance.

"I wonder," said Andrew presently, "if you know that people are talking about us, *ma chère*?"

Mirabelle commented upon this intelligence with a tilt of her eyebrows.

"Yes," continued Andrew, "it seems that our doings are become public property, and our reputations are in jeopardy."

"Yours, perhaps," remarked the girl. "As for mine, *mon ami, ça n'existe pas*."

"*Don't!*" said Andrew suddenly. "Please don't!"

"After all," said Mirabelle, "what difference? They talk, these good people, whether things are so or not. It's the women, of course. If my clothes were not *d'un chic*, they would pass me over as unworthy of consideration."

"This time," said Andrew, "it seems the ground of complaint is not clothes alone. I'm told that I'm *affiché*."

"So you are, I suppose. You were that from the moment I took your arm at Auteuil, that first afternoon. Do you object? There are many who would be glad to say as much." [243]

Andrew bit his lip. It was going to be harder than he had thought. He had come to say—he could not have told exactly what. His whole relation with Mirabelle had come so stealthily into being, and had been distinguished by a novelty, a *goût piquant* so subtle and alluring, that he had hardly been conscious of its development into something definite and established, until the thing was done. His thoughts went back to that afternoon, in his own apartment, three weeks before, when first he had kissed her. That had been the turning-point—the crisis when the whole wide world tipped upside down. His entire point of view had undergone an instantaneous readjustment as his lips met hers, and before him had opened the gate of a new world—a garden lavish of unfamiliar fruits and strange flowers, breathing a heavy, languid, deadening sweetness. He had entered, as one turns aside from the beaten road to explore some little vista of unprecedented beauty, with a vague conviction at the back of his brain, that the divergence was for a moment only, and that, so soon as his curiosity should be satisfied, he would turn back to the highway and go forward again, richer by an experience which it was not necessary to mention, and which would be as immaterial in its bearing upon the main issues of life, as a flower plucked and tossed aside in passing, or a tune whistled in a moment of lightheartedness. [244]

Now—it was singularly hard to cut to the pith of the sensation—the gate which had opened so invitingly seemed to have closed behind him. What was still more curious, he found, of a sudden, that these fruits and flowers which had tempted him by reason of their novelty, were now as familiar, as seemingly essential, as if they had always been features of his environment. The garden itself was no longer a place wherein he walked as a transient visitor, idly inspecting, but one in which he stood as proprietor. The tendrils had climbed and clung about his feet. The moment for retreat had come, and lo! he could not move!

As they talked, he grew still more conscious of the fact that this task of disentanglement which he had planned, was one beset with unexpected difficulties. Mirabelle had practically disregarded the inclined plane of suggestion by which he had sought to lead up to the main issue, and, with a little air of proprietorship, had begun to map out her plans for the coming week—plans in which Andrew figured as naturally, as much as a matter of course, as did her carriage or her meals or her gowns. For the first time, he realized to what an extent she had a claim upon him. For the first time, the curb replaced the snaffle. For the first time, the bit made its presence fully felt. Andrew stirred uneasily.

"*M'amie*," he said, "we've been much in each other's company of late—more, perhaps, than is best for either of us." [245]

"How can that be?" asked Mirabelle, with a little laugh. "We love each other—*ça suffit*. It's impossible to be too much together."

Her voice was quite even, but that was not to say that she did not scent the approaching issue.

"But people say—" began Andrew.

"Oh, *lalà! People say!* What *don't* they say, my poor friend? What won't they continue to say, however you choose to live, and whatever you choose to do? That's Paris, and that's the smallest village in Brittany, and everything in between, into the bargain. Nowadays, one must do as one sees fit, and have the courage of one's convictions. We've chosen our way. It's too late to think of what people say. After all, it's gossip, all this, and gossip is a snake. One kills it if one can; but, in the long run, it's better to step over it and forget. What does gossip amount to? If you're seen always with your wife, it's because you can't trust her alone; if you're never seen with her, it's because you've interests elsewhere. If you spend your nights in public, you're a profligate; and if you spend them at home, you're a secret drinker. 'People say!' Let them say, Andrew. It can't make any difference."

"Our—our friendship is the talk of the American Colony," said Andrew, almost savagely.

Mirabelle looked at him suddenly, with a curious crinkling of her forehead. The issue now lay clear before her. [246]

"And you are ashamed of *that*?" she asked.

She leaned back wearily, closing her eyes.

"Yes, of course you are," she added. "I wonder why it is that we—*nous autres*—never seem to realize what it means, all this. A little laughter, a kiss or two, and the rest, a '*je t'aime*' which means something less than nothing, and then—They speak of the women whom men abuse! What is that to being *used*—and flung aside?"

"Mirabelle!"

"Ah, don't speak to me! I know all that you're going to say—I've heard it all before! I knew it, back there a minute, when you kissed me, thinking of another woman! It's the old story—a little harder to bear this time, perhaps, because I've cared very much for you. Somehow, you seemed different from other men. You were young, you were gentle, you were respectful, *mon Dieu!*—respectful! I thought that it was for *me* you cared—*me*, as you saw me here, loving and needing to be loved—not the Mirabelle Tremonceau who is dressed like a doll by Paquin and Louise—the Mirabelle Tremonceau of the Acacias, and the Palais de Glace, and the Café de Paris. I said to myself that it had not all been in vain—the training, the care, the painstaking which have made me what I am. Long since, I'd come to loathe all these, my surroundings, but, for the first time, it seemed to me that perhaps they were not a sham and an imitation and a mockery. You were a gentleman—not a *rasta*, like the others. I thought your instincts couldn't play you false, and that I saw that they prompted you to regard me, here in my own home, as a woman and a friend, not merely as a mistress and a toy. From the first, you never presumed, you never let the thought of what, at worst, I might have been to you, come forward to shame the thought of what I was, at best! I said to myself that you cared for *me*—for my mind—my heart—and that what was most to others was nothing to you. When you kissed me first—that afternoon—ah, *mon Dieu!* I thought it was not the kiss of passion, but the kiss of love! At that moment you knew fully what I was—if you'd not guessed it before, but you asked for—nothing! Instead you played, and your soul was in the music. I've never heard such playing. It was pure—pure—*pure!* Ah!—" [247]

She opened her eyes slowly, without looking at him.

"And I was happy—happier than I've ever been: because, I said, there must still be a little something in me of all I thought I'd lost. I'd not loved you before that day. It was while we were there together that it came. I would to God you'd let me go then—let me go with the memory of a look which I'd never seen in a man's eyes before—the look which said 'Respect.'"

For a moment there was silence, and then Mirabelle laughed shortly.

"That was what I was fool enough to think—all that! *Quelle idiote! Nous voilà, cher ami*, at the end of the chapter. Your glove is worn: you must replace it. Your flower is wilted: you must have another for your lapel!" [248]

Now she looked full at him, her lip curling.

"It is like the Moulin," she added. "*Combien est-ce que tu me donnes, beau brun?*"

Andrew swung himself to a kneeling posture.

"What are you saying?" he demanded hotly. "My God! Does what has been between us mean nothing to you? Have I ever suggested—have I ever said a word to justify such a monstrous thing? I—"

"Just now you kissed me, thinking of another woman!" exclaimed Mirabelle. "Did you suppose I didn't know? Why, I've *loved* you—that's how I knew! Do you realize what all this meant? You could have made me good again. I would have left all this—forgotten it—blotted it out! I could have gone away quietly into the country, and lived my life out, without a regret. I could almost have been content never to see you again—never to hear from you, if I could have remembered—what once was true—that you respected me! Forgive what I said just now. It was coarse—unworthy of all that has been. But you don't understand. I wish I'd not said what I did; and yet, at times, I feel that way—I mean, as if it were all the same—at the Moulin Rouge or here—they for an hour, I for a month, but each flung away presently, like the dregs of wine. I've laughed at the knowledge that that is how it is; always laughed—until the shadow of the thought fell on you!" [249]

She slid her cool fingers into the hand he started to raise in protest, and held it close against her cheek.

"Then it maddened me. You see, everything has been different with you from what it was with the others. I'd never have believed that I could care for any man as I have for you—and perhaps I shouldn't have cared for you as I have, if you'd come into my life in any other way. But you asked to be presented to me, and waited for Radwalader to get my permission; you talked to me as to a young girl of your own *monde*; and if at first I didn't understand what that meant, I soon saw that it was because *you didn't know!* Is it any wonder that I came to love you?—you who alone of all men yielded me the exquisite homage of respect? I dreaded the moment when the change must come—when that deference which intoxicated me like a new wine should be touched with a growing spirit of license, which from you would have been intolerable! From day to day I watched you, but even when I knew that you suspected what I was, my eyes—*mon Dieu*, how keen they were!—could see no change in you—and that was the greatest surprise of all. And when, in that moment of madness, I as much as told you, and you were gentle with me, what had been love for your treatment of me became, all at once, love for just—*you!*" [250]

With an almost imperceptible pressure she drew him closer to her. As she went on speaking, her fingers touched his temples and his hair in a succession of tiny, soft caresses which were like

the embryos of spoken endearments.

"*Mon bien aimé!* Never will you be able to comprehend what you thus came to mean to me. I have always been vain, lazy, passionately desirous of all that is softest, sweetest, most palatable in life; and these things I have had—but at what a price! Then *you* came, and with you a flash of hope! I made myself believe, I don't know what! Marriage? Yes, there was even that in my mind; and there was, as well, the idea of going away, as I've said, into the country, and letting the four winds and the sunlight of heaven wash and wash and wash me, through all the years of my life, until I should go out of this world as white as I came in! Ah! I don't know what it was, that little flash of hope, except that it seemed to say that escape was possible, and it was to *your* hand I clung, seeking the outlet. But that was only for one night—for just that one night! With the next day, with all the sights and sounds to which I am accustomed—the Allée at noon, Armenonville at tea-time, Paillard's at midnight—I saw what the end must be; and, since then, I've watched, as only a woman watches, for that first little hint of its coming which only a woman sees! Ah, *mon cheri*, it has come, it has come indeed! For a moment I cried out in my agony against the fate which is separating us. You must forgive me that. Six weeks—a little slice of spring—and already you are tired of me. *Mon amour—mon amour!*"

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Andrew turned, and, with his forehead on her knees and his lips against her fingers, battled silently against the swelling in his throat and the hot moisture stinging his inner lids. In the warm, perfume-laden silence, both the man and the girl went back in thought to their individual as well as their associated past. For the end of each successive stage of life has this in common with the concluding moments of the whole: as with a drowning person, all preceding incidents and emotions start up in orderly array, intensified and in their proper light.

So Andrew, reviewing the past three weeks, was prey to a passionate regret. In this there was censure, not so much of his own weakness, as of the test which had laid it bare. In youth, reaction carries with a merciless arraignment of all which has made possible disloyalty to standard; with age, men learn to blame themselves, their own folly and frailty. In his heart of hearts, Andrew impugned the girl; and when, under the impetus of her resentment, she had voiced that scathing sneer, he had almost welcomed it, as an excuse for the course he was determined to pursue. For an instant, pity and regret were swallowed up in a profound sense of indignity. In its essentials, her speech seemed no better than a touch of the brutal vulgarity which, with deliberation, he had avoided all his life. It had that very element of the sordid which had held him aloof from the student excursions from Cambridge into Boston—excursions so apt to end in brawls, drunken clamour, tears, and maudlin reconciliations. It was of a piece with a dispute over the finish of a game of cards, with the recriminations of an aggrieved supper companion, with the abuse of an exasperated bartender. It cut him to the quick, and, for the moment, seemed to place Mirabelle on a level with the women with whom she desperately classed herself. "It is like the Moulin!" As she said the words, it was as if the wand of a harlequin had touched the scene. The faint perfume of the Gloire de Dijon roses which he himself had sent her turned suddenly to the stale smell of the tobacco smoke which hung densely over the dancers in the Red Mill of Montmartre; and Mirabelle herself, with her angry eyes, was at one with the painted, powdered, and bedizened monstrosity whom Radwalader had snubbed one evening as she paused at the table where he and Andrew were sampling an atrocious *liqueur* and watching an unlovely quadrille. But the impression passed as it had come. She was herself again, supremely beautiful, and supremely appealing in her avowal of devotion; and the element of romance which, in his mind, had always characterized their relation was intensified rather than diminished by this touch of tragedy.

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Mirabelle rose suddenly, looking down upon him.

"I understand," she said; "but there is one thing I would like to ask you. This other woman—do you love her? Will all this procure you what you want?"

"I don't know," faltered Andrew. "Perhaps not."

"Then why—"

"Oh, how can I explain to you?" he exclaimed, rising in his turn. "It's just this—I *must* make another try, and to do that I *must* be free! You have the right to ask—what *haven't* you the right to ask! I'll tell you the truth—that's all I can do now. The girl I asked to marry me flung me off because—because—"

"Because of *me*?"

She bent forward, staring at him, as if she would wring the truth from his hesitation.

"Yes—because of you."

"And when was this? When *was* it, I ask you? Was it—*before*?"

"Yes."

"Then she had no grounds for what she said? She was wrong—she misjudged you—and then you came back to me!"

"Yes."

"Why—*why*?"

"I don't know," said Andrew miserably. "I owed you something. I couldn't hear you accused like that when there was no reason. You were my friend."

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"And so—you gave up the woman you—loved? Ah, *mon Dieu!*"

She paused, and then her eyes blazed suddenly with such a light as he had never seen in them, and her hands went to her temples with a bewildered flutter.

"It was for me," she said, "for me! And to-morrow it is to be *adieu*?"

"To-morrow?"

Briefly they searched each other's eyes.

"I mean to-night, of course," said Mirabelle evenly. "Andrew—there is one thing I would like to ask of you, before you go. Will you—will you kiss me once—not as you have ever kissed me?" Her fingers touched her forehead. "Will you kiss me—here?"

He advanced a step and did as she had asked, then fell back.

"Mirabelle—Mirabelle!"

"Ah, don't think of me, my friend. I don't mean to be cruel—but I have—other interests. Let us say good-by, and part—friends. I trust you may be happy."

"Mirabelle!"

Andrew's voice broke suddenly.

"Then it's good-by?"

"Yes," said Mirabelle; and, with a little sob, he bent and kissed her hand.

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When he had gone, she stood irresolutely, her lips parted and her eyes very bright. Then she wheeled and walked slowly toward the mantel. A photograph of Thomas Radwalader leaned there against a slender vase. As it met her eyes, she snatched abruptly at it, tore it into twenty pieces, and scattered the fragments in the air.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

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### A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

"He's gone for a couple of days," observed Vicot bluntly, as he opened the door of Andrew's apartment to Radwalader, about noon of the following day. "He left a note for you. It's on his desk."

"I'll come in and read it," answered Radwalader, with his customary lack of manifest surprise. "It may require an answer."

He pulled off his gloves in a leisurely manner, as he entered the little *salon*, and stood looking down at the note addressed to him.

"Perhaps," he added, "you'll save me the trouble of opening this by giving me a brief epitome of its contents."

"He didn't honour me with his confidence," said Vicot. "And he left the note sealed."

Radwalader turned the envelope, flap up.

"I see you've been careful to restore it to its original condition," he remarked. "You're skilful at this kind of thing, my friend—uncommonly skilful. I fail to perceive the slightest evidence of your tampering."

"Then why not give me the benefit of the doubt?" demanded the other sullenly.

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"Because, with the best will in the world, it's quite impossible to give you the benefit of something which doesn't exist. A sealed letter and a corked bottle, you see, are two things which habit has long since made it impossible to resist."

"Not a drop of liquor has touched my lips to-day!" exclaimed Vicot.

"And it's past noon!" retorted Radwalader lightly. "Is this a miracle of which you are informing me, or have you been taking it through a tube?"

He took up the note, and seated himself deliberately in Andrew's chair. Vicot watched him alertly, gnawing his lip.

"Am I to know what it's about?" he demanded presently.

"There's no conceivable reason why you should," was the answer; "but, on the other hand, there seems to be no conceivable reason why you shouldn't. Only pray don't stand upon ceremony, my good Jules. If you know the contents, do be kind enough to say so, and spare me the effort of useless recapitulation."

"I've practically told you already. I haven't touched it."

"Curiously enough," said Radwalader, "I believe you."

He threw the note upon the table, and Vicot, picking it up, scanned it eagerly.

"I've gone back," he read slowly, "for another try."

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"Well?" inquired Radwalader pleasantly. "Are you any the wiser?"

"What does it mean?" asked Vicot, looking down at him.

"It means," said Radwalader, "that the game is up."

"Damnation!"

"My *good* Jules!" protested Radwalader, "pardon the license of an old friend, who begs to suggest that your interruption is in most execrable taste!"

"What are you driving at?" exclaimed Vicot impatiently. "What does it mean, all this palaver? There's something back of it. You can't hoodwink me, Radwalader."

"Far be it from me to attempt the impossible, my astute Jules. Quite justly, you demand what I'm driving at, and, quite frankly, I've told you. The game is up. Mr. Vane has outplayed us. He's managed to get out of this pretty little tangle in a fashion at once ingenious and unexpected. I



confess myself beaten. He's gone back to the girl he intends to marry."

Radwalader paused for an instant, as a thought struck him.

"And he would have gone back long ago," he added, "if he had received a certain telegram which was sent to him three weeks ago. If that particular telegram was not intercepted *en route*, it should have reached him; if that particular telegram *was* intercepted *en route*, it should have reached *me*. Well?"

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Vicot stared at him blankly, his hand groping in his pocket.

"A telegram?" he repeated, and then drew out the blue missive which had arrived, almost simultaneously with Mirabelle, three weeks before.

"I forgot," he stammered.

"You ass!" exclaimed Radwalader. "It's lucky enough for you that your carelessness didn't interfere with my plans. As it is, I don't see that it makes much difference. Vane has been too sharp for us, all around. For once in my life, I've made a miscalculation. He's out of the net, right enough, and the best we can do is to abandon the chase and apply ourselves to something more profitable. I'm glad to think that, however unsatisfactory, from a financial point of view, the venture may have proved to me, at least you have not suffered—"

"Enough of that!" broke in Vicot. "Get to the point!"

"Why, the point is simply this. On the return of Mr. Vane, you will present, in due form, your resignation from his employ, and resume your careful surveillance of my window in the Rue de Villejust. When you shall observe it to be ornamented with a certain unpretentious blue jar, you will know that I am once more at home to you. I think I can promise you that the next case deserving of our joint attention will not be so barren of result as this one, which we are now with reluctance forced to relinquish. You might go back to driving a cab, meanwhile."

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"I'm to leave Mr. Vane's employ," said Vicot, less in the tone of inquiry than in that of reflection. "I'm to leave Mr. Vane's employ."

"Quite so, my perspicacious Jules."

"Well, then—I won't!" said Jules Vicot.

He seated himself upon the edge of Andrew's desk and folded his arms.

"Radwalader," he added, "many's the time I've listened to you. Now it's your turn to listen to me."

Radwalader, following the impulse of a momentary whim, folded his arms in turn.

"*Mon cher confrère*," he said amusedly, "I shall listen with reverent attention to whatever you may have to say."

"I know too well," continued the other, "that I can't appeal with any hope of success to your sense of pity—because you haven't any. Wilfully or otherwise, you have contrived to stifle the promptings of feeling which weaken—or is it strengthen?—other men. You're trained to perfection. But there must be one thing which even you are unable to forget—I mean the time when we were young and clean, when we smiled by day as we dreamed of what lay before us, instead of shuddering by night, as now, as we dream of what lies behind."

Radwalader nodded. "I'm not addicted, myself, to the unpleasant habit of shuddering," he said, "but I think I know what you mean by the other part of your preamble. 'When all the world was young, lad, and all the trees were green: and every goose a swan, lad, and every lass a queen!' Isn't that it? Yes, I seem to remember something of the sort, and with a not unpleasurable emotion. Continue, my good Jules."

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"Sometimes," said Vicot, moistening his lips, "the thought of that time must come back even to you. Sometimes even you, with all your callousness, must contrast what you might have been with what you are. Sometimes a face, among all those we meet, must recall to you the days when better things were possible. But if you have never been thrust back thus upon your own youth, and grown sick at thought of it, I have! There's nothing more awful."

"We've been over all this before," put in Radwalader, with a suggestion of weariness.

"You said you'd hear me out! I'm not talking religion, or even morality. I'm trying to spare you the cant to which you once objected. I don't care about the future. I'm like you in having no more dread of hell than love of heaven. No, it's not the future which hits me. But the past—! The world—the world which, long since, I ran to meet so eagerly—has made me rotten, rotten, *rotten* to the core!"

"Severe," commented Radwalader, "but strictly accurate. Continue, my Jules."

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"You can't make me angry, Radwalader. I'm changed a good bit in these past few weeks. I've been going easy on the drink for one thing, which may account for the fact that my head has cleared, and that I see a number of things in a very different light."

For an instant his eyes gleamed with a kind of eagerness.

"I wish you were easier to talk to, Radwalader," he added, his voice suddenly grown timorous with a hint of the old whimper. "With all your cold-bloodedness, you're the only—"

"When you've anything worth saying, I'm as easy to talk to as the next man," said Radwalader. "It's only when you begin to lament through your nose about the past, and remorse; and 'I remember, I remember the house where I was born,' that I'm not the pink of polite attention. I confess I can't stand that kind of thing; but, for this once, let it go. I'll hear you out."

"Well," continued the other, "one thing I've found out is that there is less tragedy than comedy about an old man looking back shamefacedly upon the past."

"That's the first sensible thing you've said," observed Radwalader.

"The tragic spectacle," added Vicot, "is that of the young man looking forward hopefully upon the future. Now the old man and the young man I describe have been in close proximity for several weeks, and the old man has learned that his own security isn't worth much, one way or another, when compared with the young man's security."

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"The old man gets ten in modesty." Radwalader carefully entered the mark in an imaginary report-book.

"The old man sees," pursued Vicot, "that a certain person whom he has been fearing is really of infinitely minor importance, after all."

"*Grand merci!*"

"This person has been jumping out of dark corners and shouting 'Boo!'—that's all. Even if he should tell all he knows about the old man—but he won't, no matter what happens: that's another thing the old man has learned—it wouldn't make any difference. Do you see? It wouldn't make any difference at all!"

He peered at Radwalader triumphantly, but the latter noted that under his folded left arm Vicot's right thumb twitched ceaselessly against his sleeve. He hugged himself upon perceiving this, and nodded.

"Shrewd old man!" he said. "Pity he didn't find all this out sooner."

"Well, soon or late," went on Vicot, "the knowledge is his now, and it's bound to be useful—not to himself, mind you, but to the *young* man! Do you begin to see? If this person is going to hound this young man, and ruin his life as he has ruined others, it will have to be by new tricks. The old man knows all the old ones—he would recognize them in their earliest stages—he would be able to checkmate this—this person, before he had fairly made the first move!"

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"Is that all?" inquired Radwalader.

"All? Yes—it's all until I hear what you have to say."

"Oh, I'm expected to take part in the conversation, am I? I thought I was only to listen. Well, then, my good Jules, if you will allow me to dispense with the thin disguise of the old man and the young man and the certain person—as the phrases are becoming wearisome—suppose I were to say to you that all this is entirely without interest, so far as I'm concerned? We've fought over all this ground of my hold upon you; and you know as well as I that you're at liberty to test its efficacy whenever your courage is equal to the ordeal. We've also wasted some time upon your maunderings over your past probity, youthful innocence, and present degeneration. I'm sorry, but I can't get up the faintest gleam of enthusiasm on this subject. Indeed, it bores me intolerably, and I beg you'll spare me from it in the future. As regards Mr. Andrew Vane, whom you see fit to think in danger of being 'ruined,' I've already stated that I've no further designs upon him. Altogether, my good Jules, I consider that I've done no more than shamefully waste my time by giving you my undivided attention for the past ten minutes."

Vicot revolved these remarks in silence for a few moments, glancing up covertly once or twice from under his heavy lids, as if in hope of surprising the other in an expression indicative of some idea at variance with his words. But in each instance Radwalader met his eyes with his quiet, non-committal smile.

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"It seems you were right," continued the latter presently, "in saying you have changed. If it pleases you to imagine that the alteration is in the nature of a great moral awakening, by all means consider it so. To my way of thinking, it's more like one of the transient panics of a Louis XI., praying to the little images in his cap, and ready, the next moment, to resume his misdoing at the point where he left off. Only one thing is made clear by what you've said, and that is that you're no longer fit for the kind of work I've thus far found for you. From to-day we part company."

He rose slowly to his feet, and was about to move towards the door, when he was checked by a movement on the other's part. Following his old habit, Vicot had thrust his hands into his pockets.

"That suits me," he answered. "But please to remember this. I've been cleaning and loading your weapons for you so long that I know their uses as well as yourself. I'm able to turn them effectively against you, and I'll do it if need be. I would be resigning the little hold I have upon security, perhaps; but I'd not be doing it uselessly. Some men fling themselves into the sea, simply to be rid of life: others save the life of another by quietly slipping off a log that won't keep two afloat. Both acts are suicide, but, somehow, there's a difference."

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"Ah, I begin to see," said Radwalader. "Sidney Carton all over again—eh? I, in the leading rôle of guillotine, come down upon you and chop off your head, while Mr. Vane goes free. 'It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done,' and all that. It's a pity that Mr. Vane, by his own shrewdness, has already obviated the danger which threatened him, and that you no longer have the opportunity of exercising your lofty purpose."

"If I could believe that!" observed Vicot.

"Believe what?"

"Why, believe that the smallest part of what you've told me is true—that the game's up—that you're beaten—that Mr. Vane is free. But I can't. What have you often said to me?—that you never turn back, never give up. And yet, knowing you're defeated, I find you smiling, careless, ready to chuck the game and begin on something else. Does that ring true? You know whether it does or not. You know whether I've any reason to trust you? No! And so I refuse to leave Mr. Vane's employ."

"Might one inquire," asked Radwalader, "what you expect to gain?"

"Nothing," replied Vicot, "which you would appreciate or even understand. I expect to gain self-respect."

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"Indeed! May I ask whose?"

"If I cannot be anything myself," continued Vicot, disregarding the sneer, "I can at least be of use to this boy. I can show him my life, teach him how insignificant slips are the beginnings of moral avalanches, and how bitter are the dregs when one has had the wine."

"You're an authority on *that* point, at all events," commented Radwalader dryly. "But what insensate delusion is this, my eloquent, disreputable Jules? What can you possibly be to him, or he to you? How can you even begin to speak to him upon this personal plane? At the first symptom of such insolent effrontery, he'd give you a week's wages in lieu of notice, and show you the door. Faugh! Why, man, he's your master, your employer, your—"

"He's my son!" said Jules Vicot.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

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### A DOG AND HIS MASTER.

For a long moment after this announcement, Radwalader stared at the speaker curiously. Vicot had straightened himself, and met his eyes with a kind of boldness which he had never shown before.

"He is my son!" he repeated presently. "Sit down, Radwalader. You may as well hear the whole story. My name's no more Vicot than yours is. It's John Vane, and twenty-five years ago it was as respected as any in Boston. I'd everything to live for, as the saying is, and I might have realized it all; but, except for about a year, just after I left college, I never seemed to get a grip on things. I had money—perhaps that was the trouble. Everything came my way for a time, but I mixed myself up in speculation, and it wasn't long before I found myself ruined. I—I was married. My wife stuck to me, even after I began to drink, but after the liquor'd had a chance to make me about what I've been ever since you've known me, and I saw that she was beginning to despise me, I grew—or thought I grew—to hate her. We were living in a wretched little house in Kingsbridge, the drink was gaining on me every day, and things got worse and worse. I expect I was brutal to her, though half the time I didn't know what I was saying. Anyhow, she drew farther and farther away from me, till after a few months the fact that we were man and wife was nothing more than a hideous burlesque. She wouldn't let me touch her, she'd hardly answer when I spoke to her, and that made me furious. The conditions were intolerable, maddening; and when another woman came into my life, who flattered me and seemed fond of me and had enough money for us both, I saw a way of escape. I deserted my wife, soothing what little conscience I had left, with the thought that she'd go back to her father, be cared for, and think herself well rid of me. I sailed for Liverpool with the other. That was twenty-one years ago—on Thanksgiving Day, 1879. For a little, I reformed, but the old habits came back, of course, and, the first I knew, I was done by as I'd done. My—my companion left me, with a small monthly allowance and the information that this would be continued so long as I made no attempt to see her. She knew me pretty well by then, you see! And she was right. I accepted, and for fifteen years I managed to live on this pittance, drifting all over Europe and turning my hand to whatever job came my way. Then she died, and the allowance came to an end. I was here in Paris, strapped; and it was then you caught me in what was, for me, too bold an attempt at swindling—the case of Mr. Rutherford, of course. You knew me for a thief and a forger, and I was fully prepared to have you turn me over to the police, when I discovered that you were no better than myself, and that your knowledge was to be used not to betray, but merely to intimidate me. You know the rest—up to the moment when you told me that I was to become the servant of Mr. Vane.

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"All this time I had never so much as heard of his existence. Indirectly, I'd learned of my wife's death, but that it was because of the birth of a child—that I never knew. Even when I heard the name I wasn't more than momentarily startled. It's not an uncommon one, and nothing was farther from my mind than the thought that I might have a son. But it was only a few days before I guessed. The name 'Andrew' gave me the first clue. It's his grandfather's. Then, when I began to probe into his letters, as you'd told me to, I soon learned the truth. And, from the moment I was sure, my mind was made up. I'd made a botch of my own life, and here I was engaged in an attempt to make a botch of his. Well, then, I wouldn't. The time didn't seem right for saying anything to you. I thought I could do more good by keeping mum, and watching. If you'll look back—" and Vicot's voice took on a new note of pride—"you'll find that I haven't given you a scrap of information which would tend to damage him in any way, or put him in your power."

"That," observed Radwalader, "appears, from my knowledge of the case, to have been simply because you didn't know anything worth telling. I thought I was going to need your services, but, as it happened, I didn't. Things went very well by themselves."

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"But it was only last night," continued Vicot, after a moment, "that I realized what this boy meant to me. After you'd gone out to dinner, I picked up what was lying on that table. I'd never seen it before. Either it had just come, or else he's kept it locked up. Do you remember what it was? It was that picture—there!"

He flung out one hand passionately, pointing at the miniature on the mantel behind Radwalader.

"Look! I found *that*—the picture of my wife and the mother of my son!"

Radwalader rose slowly, turned, walked across to the mantel, and bent forward to examine the picture. As Vicot continued, the vague expression of interest on the other's face deepened to one of eager scrutiny. His eyebrows came together, as of one who strives to recollect, and then a small, sneering smile began to curl the corners of his lips.

"That settled the question. As I say, I've made a rotten failure of everything, but there's one chance left! When I saw her picture, I saw my duty, and I was glad—my God! how glad I was! So now I'm resolved. You can do as you please. You can say what you will. You can flay me alive, if you like, or send me to the galleys, or ruin me in any fashion in your power. I've seen the picture of the woman I wronged, and I've seen my way to make good. From somewhere, perhaps, she'll see and understand. He's my son! Do as you think best—you'll never harm him. He shall marry this girl he loves, and that without a word out of your mouth—curse you! I'm not afraid for myself. My life's over. But the sins of the fathers shall *not* be visited upon the children! God Almighty Himself won't deny me this chance. And *there* is my highest trump, Master Radwalader. Can you take the trick?"

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"Yes, by God!" exclaimed Radwalader, wheeling full upon him, "and with the ace! I knew that face last night, though at the time I couldn't place it. So *that* is the woman you deserted at Kingsbridge twenty-one years ago—your wife—the mother of Andrew Vane! Oh, don't assure me! I know you're telling the truth, right enough, but I know more than that. Shall I tell you? Well, then, what *you* rejected I picked up; what *you* were fool enough to desert I was wise enough to appreciate. *Your wife*—ho! You tell me that she wouldn't answer you when you spoke to her, that for months she wouldn't let you touch her, that your marriage was a farce. Here is what I tell *you*. I found no such difficulty. She answered me readily enough she took my hand before I'd known her five minutes, and everything she denied you, she gave to me! Do you understand what *that* means? It means that if the father of Andrew Vane is alive to-day, he's not alive in the person of Jules Vicot or of John Vane, but in that of Thomas Radwalader!"

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He threw himself violently into the chair again, and his nervous tension snapped in a shrill laugh. As the last words left his lips, it was as if an unseen hand had snuffed out the light in the eyes of the man who had been John Vane. His exaltation left him, and he braced himself rigidly against the desk, leaning far back, and staring, staring through the singular, dull film which had come across his pupils. He gave no audible evidence, until Radwalader had spoken again, that he had understood or even heard.

"What a witch Fate is! What hands she deals! A moment since, you were nearer to having me in a tight place, Jules—er—Mr. Vane, than you ever have been, or than you're ever likely to be again. There's just one thing against which I've never been able to secure myself, and that is the possibility of some sudden, overmastering emotion in those whom I'm forced to trust. I've never been so unfortunate as to run foul of it before, but when you were trumpeting remorse, and self-sacrifice, and atonement, and so forth, a moment ago, I confess I thought you had the odd trick. With hysteria, all things are possible, and a majority probable. If Andrew Vane had been in reality your son, and you'd not chosen to believe that I'd no further plans in regard to him, you might have done me an infinite deal of harm. You disturbed me—you disturbed me considerably, Mr. Vane. But, lo and behold! a turn of the wheel, a throw of the dice, a deal of the cards, and I am able, with extreme relish, to snap my fingers in your face—because, since he is *not* your son, but mine, you're going to keep your mouth shut even more tightly in the future than you have in the past! If you'd not been an idiot, as well as a coward, you'd have known long ago that my hold over you hasn't been worth the paper on which it was written. My very silence about what I knew of the Rutherford swindle made me an accessory after the fact. Strange you didn't think of that! But now—things are very different. You'll keep your mouth shut, my dear Mr. Vane, because, while nothing but shame could have come to the boy by the revelation that he was your son, the shame would be multiplied a thousand-fold by the public admission that he is mine!"

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As he paused, the other blinked, and strove in vain for an instant before he could find his voice.

"A lie!" he murmured hoarsely. "All a damned lie!"

"Let's see if it is," answered Radwalader. "I don't deal in that dangerous commodity if I can avoid it. There never was a lie yet which it wasn't possible, sooner or later, to nail: and that in itself is enough to make me fight shy. I never take unnecessary risks. Besides, in the present instance, the truth fits my needs to a nicety. So I think you'll believe what I'm going to tell you."

Vicot gave a short, bewildered nod, seeming to ask him to continue.

"The facts, then, are these: After having disgraced, and, presumably, maltreated, the woman who had the misfortune to be your wife, you deserted her, by your own confession, and thereby, as no doubt you will concede, relinquished whatever claim you had upon her, and all right of supervision or control over what she chose to do. You left her in poverty and wretchedness—and I found her. You sought escape and consolation: she did the same. You found them in the company of another woman: she found them in the company of another man. I was so happy as to be that man. *Voilà!* It's quite simple."

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"Lies—all lies!" broke in Vicot passionately. "She was not that kind. She was a saint on earth!"

"Ah, you've learned to appreciate her!"

"Never in God's world would she have stooped to you—unless you brought deceit to bear."

Vicot was picking feverishly at the edge of the desk, his filmed eyes shifting and shifting in their sockets.

"Well, then—yes!" said Radwalader. "If I'm nothing else, at least I'm loyal to the women who—er—have, as you courteously put it, stooped to me. I *did* bring deceit to bear. I was interested in

mesmerism in those days, and highly adept. When I came upon her, by merest chance, she was desperate, unstrung, and, I think, on the point of collapse. In a very natural attempt to calm her, I put forth an influence which had already been proved considerable. To my surprise she yielded completely to it, and passed, almost before I realized what I'd done, into a state of profound trance, in which I found her wholly subject to my will. Up to that moment—believe me or not, as you choose—I had no ulterior motive. But when I found her walking, talking as I desired, interest led me on. I directed her back to the town—we met on a hill-road back of it—willing her to lead me to her home. I'd some thought of explaining matters to her family, but when I found that she apparently had none, when I saw the squalor and dreariness in which she lived, curiosity impelled me to question her, and from her unconscious answers I gained enough to confirm my present knowledge of who she was. Then—I was but human—she was very beautiful—the circumstances—"

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"Stop!" broke in Vicot. "I understand what you're going to say."

"So much the better: we're saved the necessity of going into unpleasant details. Suffice it to say that what happened, happened. Already, as we walked together, I'd said enough to impress my mentality upon hers, to make her mind my property, and her will subject to mine. When I left her I meant to go back, to help and uplift her, to marry her, perhaps. Who knows? I was very young then and a good deal of a pedant."

"So you never went back," said Vicot. "You left her—*like that!*"

"Just as you'd left her, the same day," retorted Radwalader, his complacency quite restored. "Don't let's get to recriminations. I fancy it's a case of pot and kettle."

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"All this doesn't prove that the boy's not mine," exclaimed the other, with sudden energy.

Radwalader rose, came quite close to him, and said with a little sneer:

"Do you think it's likely? It's a question of the simplest arithmetic. Vane's not yet twenty-one—and what have you told me? Look back—calculate."

Vicot made no reply. He was peering at Radwalader's face, and presently he whispered:

"My God! *He's even got your eyes!*"

"From the sublime to the ridiculous," said Radwalader. "A moment since, you were spouting heroic sentiments, and had me so obviously at a disadvantage that I—yes, I was almost afraid of you. Now we're parties to a *dénouement* which would seem to have come from the pen of Alfred Capus."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Vicot lifelessly.

"Do? Why, nothing. What is there to do, except to be thankful that a discerning Providence has put it out of your power to injure me. The boy's mine—there can't be a doubt of it—and if you so much as open your lips on the subject, you not only disgrace yourself and me, but Andrew as well, and, most of all, the memory of your wife. That's enough: I'm satisfied. Sheer common-sense will show you, as it shows me, that silence is the only course. Andrew believes, as does every one else, that his father is dead. We alone, of all men, know the truth—and we agree to hold our tongues."

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"If I could trust you!" exclaimed Vicot, "but I can't—I *can't!* You've laid a trap for him—you know you have!—just as you did for the others, because he's young, and reckless, and rich! You called me in to help you, and probably the Tremonceau girl as well. Oh, I know how it's worked! Well, that's why I must stick by him, and guard him, and see to it that he can marry the girl he wants to—"

Suddenly Radwalader laughed.

"Why, what an ass it is!" he said. "Look here, you mountebank! The only person who has brought Andrew Vane into trouble, from the very beginning of all this, is *you!* I couldn't *make* him compromise himself: I could only set the bait. He nibbled at it, to be sure, but he was never in my power or Mirabelle Tremonceau's for a moment. He loved another girl. He went to her and asked her to marry him, and she refused him, but he'd no sooner left her than she thought better of it and sent for him. If that message had reached him, he would never have seen Mirabelle again; but it didn't reach him, and, quite naturally, he took the next best thing. Now she's his mistress, and he's just where I've wanted to have him all along. For all this, Mr. Vane, I have only you to thank!"

"I?" repeated Vicot. "What have I to do with it?"

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"This much: that, while you've been planning to keep him out of my power, the very thing that would have done so once and for all has been lying in your pocket. A moment ago you laid a telegram upon the table. It's still there. Open it!"

Slowly, wonderingly, Vicot tore the blue paper open and read aloud the five words which it contained:

"Come back to me. MARGERY."

Radwalader slipped his hands into his pockets.

"Exactly," he said. "Do you see?"

"But you said, only a little while ago," stammered Vicot, "that the game was up—that you wouldn't do anything more."

"Only by way of shutting your mouth," said Radwalader coolly. "Since then there've been developments. When I said that, I was, as I've already told you, anxious to get rid of you. Now—well, you won't blab in any event, because the small sum of money which it will cost Vane to get rid of Mirabelle is nothing compared with what it would mean to him if you forced me into pitting my knowledge of his origin against your accusations of me."

"And so," cried Vicot furiously, "you're determined to hold this over him. You'll hound him and hound him—damn you!—till perhaps you'll drive him desperate—till you drive him to kill himself—and end up in the Morgue, like young Baxter—and then you'll go and look at him, staring out through the glass—and you'll smile and light a cigarette and whistle 'Au Clair de la Lune'! You hell-hound!"

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He flung himself forward, as if he would have seized the other by the throat, halted suddenly as Radwalader's right hand came from his pocket, and stooped, staring cross-eyed into the shining mouth of a revolver, held without a tremor six inches from his contorted face.

"Get back, you dog!" said Radwalader; and at the words, as if he had been a dog indeed, Vicot shuddered, went limp, and sank whimpering at his master's feet.

"Now listen to me as well as you're able," continued Radwalader. "If you stir hand or foot in this matter, you're a lost man. It's no longer the old story: you know what's at stake *now*! I don't know what this madness of yours may lead you to, but I've myself to protect, and you may rest assured I'll do that, no matter at what cost. If, through some distorted and drunken idea of protecting him, you betray me, I'll hound you—since you talk of hounding—as never was a man hounded before. I'd sacrifice not only you, not only Vane, not only the memory of his mother, but myself into the bargain. If I pull down all Paris about my ears, I'll beat you, do you hear?—I'll beat you, my man—I'll beat you!"

As he finished, Vicot dragged himself to his elbows and looked up. His face was ghastly, and wet with ridiculous insensate tears.

"All right, Radwalader," he whined. "Do as you please, only for God's sake don't let this get out. If you must have the money, get it from him, but don't ruin his life—don't let him know. I won't breathe a word—I swear I won't—and I'll do whatever else you ask of me—anything—God knows I will!"

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He was on his knees now, clutching at Radwalader's coat.

"Now it's all right, isn't it?" he asked. "It's all right between us? You won't tell, and I won't tell. We understand each other, Radwalader, don't we?—ha, yes, we understand each other, you and I!"

"*God!*" said Radwalader, flinging him off. "Is it a man or a worm?"

Briefly he stood, looking down at the thing which writhed and whimpered before him, and then touched it curiously with his foot. A moment later, the outer door closed behind him with a sullen slam.

For a long time—for five hours and more—Vicot lay where he had fallen. At first he choked and sobbed, repeating fragments of his miserable appeal, but gradually even this incoherent murmur died down to silence. The long summer afternoon stole by; and from the street outside came the commingled sounds of a busy thoroughfare—the rattle of wheels, the cries of venders, the clamour of children playing; and still he lay, as motionless as one dead. It was only when the sunlight swung in horizontally through the window on the Rue Boissière, and the bell of a neighbouring church was striking six, that he stirred, rose, and went slowly across to stare down into the street. A cab was standing at the corner—a cab of the Compagnie Urbaine.

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Suddenly Vicot smiled.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

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### FAIR EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY.

At eleven o'clock that night, the electric door-bell of Radwalader's apartment gave two short staccato chirps and then a prolonged whir. At the sound he looked up sharply from his evening mail, and drew his eyebrows together in a puzzled frown.

"At this hour?" he said to himself, and then, closing the doors of *La Boîte* behind him, went out to answer the summons.

Mirabelle entered deliberately, passing before him into the *salon*, and shredding a little note in her slender fingers.

"There's no need of this now," she explained, scattering the pieces in the empty fireplace. "It was merely to ask you to call to-morrow. I'd have mailed it if I'd not found you at home."

She flung back her light wrap as she spoke, disclosing a superb evening gown, and a profusion of diamonds slightly on the safe side of undue ostentation. Withal, she had a nice sense of fitness in the matter of dress. It was a safety-valve not possessed by many of her *monde*, and which, at all times, guaranteed her against exploding into vulgarity.

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"I confess," said Radwalader, "that I was surprised when I recognized your ring. Of late, your visits have been so infrequent that when I'm favoured with one at this—to say the least—unconventional hour, I'm sure that its object is of some importance."

Mirabelle looked at him coolly, with a slightly contemptuous droop of her eyelids.

"I believe that it's a characteristic of both the visits I make and those I receive," she said lazily, "that they're seldom without an object. As for the hour, I'm not to be judged by the conventionality for which you manifest so commendable—and so abrupt—a concern. We Parisians are like our allies, the Russians: we go by standards of time which differ from those of the rest of

the world. May I sit down?"

"I beg your pardon!" said Radwalader. "Do—by all means."

Mirabelle installed herself in an armchair, and her eyes were travelling to and fro about the room. Something in the curious confidence of her manner, a confidence that was almost insolence, turned Radwalader vaguely uneasy. He was standing with his back to her, lighting his inevitable cigarette. There was nothing in his expression to indicate enjoyment of that usually enjoyable operation.

"Any news?" he inquired, as the tobacco caught.

"Would you mind turning around?" asked Mirabelle sweetly. "I dislike talking to shoulders." [285]

Radwalader wheeled upon her with a bow.

"You are irresistible, *ma chère*," said he. "After all, what use? I know you're clever, and you know I am. It's quite an imbecile proceeding for us to waste poses and by-plays upon each other. What *is* the news? Has the Great Inevitable happened?"

A tiny shadow crossed her eyes at the phrase, but she answered steadily.

"If by 'the Great Inevitable' you mean that the pleasure vehicle of Mr. Vane has no further accommodations for me as a passenger, then assuredly yes—the Great Inevitable has happened."

"Ah!" said Radwalader reflectively.

"He came last night to bid me good-by. It's the old story. There's another girl—a girl he wants to marry—and one must clear the decks before going into action."

Radwalader looked at her, in silence now, but with a question in his face.

"You want to hear about the financial side, I suppose," she continued. "How pleasant they are, these little business conferences, how friendly, and yet—how dignified! It's a pity that there must be losses as well as gains in such a business as yours, *mon cher associé*. It would be so much more agreeable if one could always declare a dividend, instead of making an occasional assignment. In the present instance, I've no further report to make. He's tired of me, and he's given me my *congé*, and that's all there is to it." [286]

She looked down, fingering the lace on her gown, as if to dismiss the subject.

"You asked him?" began Radwalader.

"I asked him—nothing! And I *shall* ask him—nothing! That was what I came to tell you. I gather from your expression that it's not pleasant news. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but the truth is: I'm tired of this kind of thing. I'm going away for a little rest, and I don't care to be troubled by money matters."

Mirabelle was letting her contempt for the man before her grow dangerously apparent in her voice, and he winced under it, and then flushed darkly.

"What rubbish is this?" he demanded, almost roughly. "Is it a joke?"

"Oh, as far as possible from anything of the kind," retorted Mirabelle. "I was never more in earnest. You wished me to engage with you in blackmailing Mr. Vane, and you'll probably be kind enough to remind me that I've done this kind of thing before. I don't deny it, but—"

For the first time her voice broke slightly.

"There are reasons," she added, "why I cannot do it now."

Radwalader bit his lip. For a moment his temper well-nigh claimed the upper hand, but he was shrewd enough to match this curious unconcern with something quite as non-committal.

"You mean that you love him, I suppose," he observed. [287]

"Love?" repeated Mirabelle. "*Mon Dieu, monsieur!* what right have I to love, or you to speak of it? Haven't we grovelled enough in the mud outside of the cathedral? Must we further degrade it, as well as ourselves, by entering and laying hands upon the very shrine?"

"You love him," said Radwalader, "and he's tired of you. That's regrettable. I can stand my share of the pecuniary loss, but I grieve to see you humiliated."

He glanced at her, and was pleased to notice that her colour had deepened, and that her foot tapped the floor. He was at a disadvantage, he knew, until this curious, apathetic self-control should be broken down.

"I can spare your sympathy," she answered. "No doubt I shall recover from my humiliation, all in good time. I'm going away, as I've said. There's the little place my father left me, and that I've told you about, back of Boissy-St. Leger, at the edge of the forest, and it's enough. I didn't come here to reproach you, Radwalader, or to quarrel. I simply came to say what I've said, and go. I can't pretend to be sorry that I've made it impossible for you to carry out your plans, but—"

"Oh, *chère amie!*" broke in Radwalader, with a little wave of his hand. "Give yourself no uneasiness on that head, I beg of you. I had a strong hand before you compelled me to discard, but who knows whether it won't be improved by the draw? The game's never lost till it's played, you know." [288]

"Radwalader!"

Mirabelle leaned forward in her chair, knitting her fingers.

"Do you mean that you are—going on?"

"Why, assuredly, my friend! You can't be so ingenuous as to suppose that my plans are necessarily changed by this change in yours. I'm sorry to lose your coöperation, of course. The thing had reached a point where it would have been easy to bring it to a prompt and successful conclusion; but, unfortunately, you've seen fit to back out at the critical moment. But, as you say, there can be no need of quarrels and reproaches on either side. You are perfectly free to do as

seems best to you, but really you mustn't expect that your action binds *me*. I've spent a deal of time and thought over this business, and now I shall have to spend more—but relinquish it? Why, never in the world, my friend! Beautiful, attractive, and accomplished as you are, you must realize that you are not the only woman in the world."

"Do you mean," demanded Mirabelle, "that you're going on—with another woman—to play this whole miserable business over again, until you've had your will of him? Do you mean that what I've done doesn't stand for anything?"

"I see no necessity for giving you an outline of my exact plans," said Radwalader, "now that you've resigned from any share in them; but, if it will afford you any satisfaction, you have a tolerably accurate idea of my intentions." [289]

"Listen to me!" answered Mirabelle, with a last effort at calm. "I have done your bidding in the past, furthered your schemes, and taken my share of the gain. Bah! Why should I regret it? Regret mends no breakages. It's to the future, not to the past, that I look. I've told you what I want. I want my freedom. I want to go away into the country, and to forget—everything! I don't know how long it will last, and I don't care. All I want now is peace of mind. I don't say I'll never come back to—to all this: for no doubt I shall; but for the moment, for a time, I want to be alone, and at ease. Will you make it possible, Radwalader?"

"I? But why is it necessary to ask me that? I've said I'm sorry to lose you. You're the only woman I can absolutely trust, the only one who can hold her tongue and do as she's told. I freely forgive you this single desertion. No doubt there are particular circumstances in the case which have forced you to the course you've taken. You don't see fit to explain them, and I don't care to ask. And then it's not as if you were going away for ever. You'll come back—and shortly. Paris, the Bois, your diamonds, your amusements, your little *affaires*—they're as necessary to you as light or air. So, go by all means, and enjoy your vacation to your heart's content. I'll not disturb you. *Au revoir, ma chère!*" [290]

"Ah!" said Mirabelle brokenly. "How little, with all your cleverness, you understand a woman! Where she can be happy in her lover's happiness, no matter at what cost to her, she must be unhappy in his distress, no matter how free from personal suffering she herself may be! You asked me if I loved him. Well, then—yes! I don't mind saying that, because you'll never understand how or why. How should you? How should you know that, to a woman, a man is not so much a personality, as the author of all the new impulses and emotions which he brings into her life? You say he's tired of me, and I answer you that I'm more than repaid by what he's taught me of truth and manliness and gentleness and respect. That's why I could give him up—because I knew that his best happiness lay apart from mine. That's why I had to desert you—because I could not be party to any plot to shame or to degrade him. What I gave, I gave freely and fully. Ah, try—*try* to understand! I've been a faithful partner to you, haven't I? You yourself say I've never broken my word or made a false move in the games we've played together. I've been loyal to you, no matter what degradation it cost me, because I knew you trusted me. At first, as you know, I didn't see what I was helping you to do. I encouraged the boys you brought to me, and cast them off when you gave the word. And afterwards, when now and again you gave me something from Tiffany's, did I think?—did I know? When I found out, it was too late. I was bound to you in a way, and—well, I'll leave all that. My only point is this: I've served you faithfully, haven't I—faithfully, unflinchingly, and loyally—from first to last?" [291]

"From first to last," echoed Radwalader, slowly nodding.

"Then," said Mirabelle, with sudden passion, flinging back her head, "I ask for my reward—for my payment—for my wages. I ask of you the honour and integrity of Andrew Vane!"

"The—"

"Yes!—that—that—*that!* in payment for mine, which I've sold to you. Fair exchange is no robbery. I love him, do you hear? I've accepted my dismissal at his hands, but I do not choose that you should continue to plot against him, with another woman as bait, and with a spy in his rooms watching for every little slip and folly, and ready, when you say so, to post them all before the world—unless he *pays!* *Dieu!* I can imagine you, as you were with Chauvigny, with little De Vitzoff, with young Baxter, with Sir Henry Gore, and the rest of them! 'Unfortunate, of course, but really, you see, you've been most imprudent, and every precaution must be taken to prevent the details of this affair leaking out.' *Et cetera!* 'The only safe way with these people is to buy them off.' *Et cetera!* 'If you will put yourself in my hands, I think I can manage it for ten—twenty—thirty thousand francs.' *Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera! Eh bien—non!* I do not choose to have it so with the man I love. There are other fish for you to catch. Let me have this one's life. That much you owe me. As you call yourself a man, pay me and let me go!" [292]

She had risen with the intensity of her appeal, and now, white with passion, Radwalader flashed to his feet at her side.

"By Heaven, Mirabelle—!"

"And by Heaven, Monsieur Radwalader! What then? Are you going to threaten me? Do you take me for a Jules Vicot, at least? Do my hands tremble? Do I shrink before you? Ah, that might have been possible at first: for I don't deny that I've feared you at times; but now—*zut!* It's not the first time, my Radwalader, that the pupil has out-stripped the master. You've taught me too much for your own good. *Voyons!* A secret is safe just so long as one person knows it, and only one. But no man is secure, from the moment when he confides to others that he's not what he pretends to be. But you?—you are different. For two years past, to my knowledge, and probably for many more, you've been building up a house of cards. It's growing very tall, Monsieur Radwalader, very dangerously tall. You think the foundations strong, but they weaken with every card you add. *Allons!* Enough of this brawling. You know what I demand."



"And if I refuse?" suggested Radwalader.

"If you refuse? Ah, then your game is indeed ended and your house of cards blown down! For I'll make your name notorious, not only in Paris, but in every capital of Europe. They shall have all the details—all that Vicot, as well as I, can give them. By the blood of Christ, *monsieur*, if you don't promise what I ask, in three days the name of Thomas Radwalader, swindler, card-sharp, blackmailer, and blood-sucker, shall be the common property of the civilized world! What have I to lose, or fear, or even consider? Nothing! You know that, as well as I. And I'll save the man I love from the trap you're preparing for him, even if I send myself to St. Lazare!"

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Radwalader sank back easily into his chair.

"My good Mirabelle," he said, "all this is very admirable as sentiment and, I must say, extraordinarily well done. It's a pity that it should be wasted upon an impossible situation. Be patient with me for a moment, and I'll show you precisely why you'll neither edify the capitals of Europe with an account of my private affairs nor compel me to do anything but what I choose to do in the case of Mr. Andrew Vane. We are three in number: I, a gentleman who chooses, for reasons of his own, to keep one side of his life from the view of the general public; you, a very charming girl, most cruelly, but nevertheless conspicuously, avoided by the members of your sex who pride themselves upon respectability; and Andrew Vane, a young person wounded perhaps, but as yet not mortally, by the shafts of scandal. Now, let us see. You desire to snatch him from the—what is it?—pit?—pitfall?—ah! trap—which I am preparing for him. How do you go about it? You first associate my name with several most unpleasant terms of reproach, and then proceed to drag the combination before the public, and say, 'Here is the intimate companion of the man I love!' What does that mean? The man you love—*you!* What a happy revelation for the friends and family of Andrew Vane, who has been dawdling in your arms, while another woman as much as held his plighted word! I won't dwell on it. It's a subject by reference to which I've never sought to humiliate you—but you've driven me to touch upon it. Believe me, my friend, if it's indeed your wish to save Andrew Vane from disgrace, you should devise some project more promising than a public proclamation of the fact that you've been his mistress these few weeks past. You tell me you've nothing to fear and nothing to lose. You'll add, perhaps, that the fact's already public property, but it isn't. It's public gossip, which is a very different thing. The plain fact is this: from the instant when you associate your name with his, he's ruined absolutely and irretrievably."

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Mirabelle bent forward to look at him, almost curiously.

"Are you a man or a devil?" she said.

"A man, *ma chère*, and, in my own way, not an unreasonable or ungrateful man. To prove that, you shall have what you ask. You can see what trumpety rant you've been talking, and you probably regret it already. Once for all—and as you should have known—if threats of exposure could have effected anything, I'd have been the talk of Europe long ago. Please don't try it again. It's a waste of time and a trial of temper, and, to me at least, such scenes are always disagreeable. Now to the main issue. I will do what you wish—on one condition."

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"I accept it," said Mirabelle promptly.

"That's rash, and I release you from the pledge. Wait till you know what the condition is. As you say, there are other fish to catch, and, quite frankly, I need your aid in catching them. So you will give up your dream of rustic retirement, and remain exactly as you are, and what you are, and where you are. Also, the business relations between us—"

"Ah, no—*no!*"

"The business relations between us are to continue in force, except that on the books of the firm we shall close the account with Mr. Andrew Vane."

For an instant the little house back of Boissy-St. Leger hung on Mirabelle's vision—the rose-garden, the wide outlook on the valley of the Marne, the poplars stirred by a west wind, sweet with the breath of Fontainebleau. Side by side with these rose the contrasted mirage of crowded *cafés*, race-courses, and theatres, the half-contemptuous court of women-weary men, the unspeakable slavery, heartache, and humiliation of the life she had lived and which she loathed. Then she looked straight into Radwalader's eyes. She had no need to ask if this was final. They knew each other, these two.

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"There shall be no other woman to come between him and the one he wants to marry?" she asked.

"No other woman."

"Vicot shall have no share in his life at all?"

"No share."

"And you will never mention what he has done—in Paris—with me?"

"Never."

There was silence between them for a moment, a silence pricked only by the strokes of midnight.

"As you said, fair exchange is no robbery," suggested Radwalader.

"If I agree?—"

"You have my word. Honour among thieves!"

"*Soit!*" said Mirabelle. "God help me—have your way!"

For an instant she stood motionless, and then, with an imperious gesture, commanded his service as if she had been the empress she appeared, and he the lackey.

"My cloak, *monsieur!*"

## REDEMPTION.

At Poissy the three weeks had worn listlessly away. Margery yet remained, though the time originally set as a limit for her visit had passed. Monsieur and Madame Palffy were staying with some friends in Dresden, whom Mrs. Carnby had never seen, but whom, under the present circumstances, she whimsically described to Jeremy as being "in danger, necessity, and tribulation."

Truth to tell, she had been forced to fall back upon her own invention for means of amusement. She was chafing under a sense of helplessness in a situation which she seemed totally unable to grasp, and a fierce impatience against the social conditions which make it possible for a man to shut off the women most deeply interested in him from the most significant features of his life and conduct. She had spent a half-hour in Margery's room on the morning of Andrew's departure, and there had heard as much as she cared to about the conversation in the arbour. Upon this problem she had brought to bear all her trained powers of persuasion, and at the end had the satisfaction of bringing Margery to a less intolerant attitude. The matter of inducing her to telegraph Andrew a recall she had found more difficult.

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"I wouldn't deceive you, my dear," she said. "I'm absolutely convinced of the truth of what I say when I tell you that you've misjudged him. Oh yes—I know the appearances are all against him. I thought just as you do, until I had the courage to ask him out and out about the matter; but, when I did, I soon saw that the circumstances were unusual—extraordinarily so. He's been reckless, and, if he cares for you as he pretends to, highly inconsiderate. But I believe, as firmly as I do in my own existence, that in the main essentials he's innocent. Of course, he's been going around with this woman—even *he* doesn't deny that; but the very fact that he admits it seems to me to prove that it hasn't been as bad as you suppose. One may go a long way with a woman without going too far. Why, Margery, I could bite my tongue off when I think what I said to you last night. Just think!—I imagined I was straightening things out, and giving you your cue! Instead, it appears that I was only giving you a wrong idea, and putting everything into a hideous mess. Why, you didn't give him a fighting chance! You piled on him every accusation that came into your head, and then sent him off before he had a chance to explain. Why didn't you ask him one straight question, if that was what you wanted to know? He'd have answered you—yes, and told you the truth! If there's one thing Andrew Vane is not, it's a liar. I was sure of that before I'd known him two minutes."

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"But there wasn't any need to ask him," broke in Margery. "He said of his own accord that—that there is such a woman."

"And what else?" demanded Mrs. Carnby.

"That she wasn't any more to him than a bird that was singing near us; that he'd never see her again if I asked him."

"And you sent him away after *that!* Good heavens, my dear, that was the moment of all others when you should have said 'I believe you!' For he was telling you the truth—I'll stake my intelligence on it. It was the supreme evidence of his reliance upon you, the supreme test of your love. And you failed. Appearances? Yes, of course! And what are appearances? Nothing in the world but a perpetual reminder that we're not omniscient. Margery—you've got to call him back."

Margery made no reply.

"You owe that much to him, and you owe it to me. We've both of us been in the wrong, and you must give us a chance to set things right. If you can't take him as he is, then ask him to tell you exactly what his relations have been with this woman, and act on his answer as you see fit. I can't criticise you for doing as you think right, if only you're acting on the truth; but the truth you must have! At present you're depending upon a lot of hearsay, upon the criminally thoughtless cynicism of a gossiping old woman, and on your own rash conclusions. My dear girl, you know I love you—love you better than anything in the world, except Jeremy? Well, then, do this for me."

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"Very well," answered Margery wearily, "but it's no use, Mrs. Carnby."

That morning she telegraphed Andrew to come back to her—and there was no reply.

Thereafter the subject had not been mentioned either by the girl or her hostess. For the first time there lay a little barrier of restraint between them, which Mrs. Carnby, with all her tact, found it impossible to pass, or even clearly to define. Her customary confidence in herself stood back aghast. Any further interference, she knew, might well be set down as idle meddling. She had done her best—and failed.

Day by day she saw Margery grow paler and thinner. The old gaiety was slipping from her, flashing forth at more and more infrequent intervals, like the flame of an untended lamp, brightening more feebly, ever and anon, before it dies away. But there was nothing to be said or done. The little touches of endearment and sympathy with which women often fill the place of words, passed between them, but too often these negative interpreters of their hidden thoughts caused the girl's eyes to fill. At Mrs. Carnby's earnest entreaty, she prolonged her visit, and was glad of the seclusion of the villa, the long idle days, the evenings at billiards or backgammon with Jeremy, and the still warm nights when, through sleepless hours, reverie had free rein. Curiously enough, and despite Andrew's neglect of her, her former tenderness for him returned and grew. The first passion of her resentment having passed, she was learning to make the ample and even

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obstinate allowances of the woman who has seen love in her grasp, and had it snatched away. At the moment of her rejection of him, there had been nothing within her range of vision but the spectre of cruel and humiliating wrong. But now a thousand little appealing reminiscences came back to woo and to persuade her. The old days at Beverly; the boy-and-girl companionship wherefrom had sprung the first flower of her love; the high hopefulness of their young attitude; the bashful acknowledgment of unspoken understanding with which they parted; the long months of separation, when her unhappiness in her new surroundings was silver-shot with prescience of his coming; that coming itself, and the joyous significance of it—all these worked upon her night and day. She was learning to forget the little hints of gossip whereby she first began to doubt him, and even the terrible frankness of Mrs. Carnby's words, which had seemed to confirm all her worst suspicions. She felt that if only she had been given the time which now was hers, she would have been able to adjust these matters, reduce the gossip to its proper place of insignificance, and see, as now she saw, the vast and supreme importance of their love. Now it was herself, not him, she blamed for his silence. She had indeed not "given him a fighting chance." She had insulted him, and, at the end, sent him about his business with a heartless sneer. Mrs. Carnby's words came back to her—"love is little more than forgiveness on the endless instalment plan!"—and she had not been willing to forgive him, even when perhaps there had been nothing to forgive. She would turn restlessly, watching the dawn brightening against her window. Ah, kind God, what would she not forgive him now! What difference could anything that had been make, if only she could hear his voice again, and see him bending over the music of "The Persian Garden," and know that for all time he was hers!

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"Each morn a thousand roses brings, you say:  
Yes—but where leaves the rose of yesterday?"

Mrs. Carnby was not alone in her perception of the change in Margery. Jeremy mentioned it, one night, as they were dressing for dinner.

"I hope there's nothing gone wrong with Margery, Louisa."

"I hope not," retorted his wife, dragging savagely on the comb.

"Then you've noticed?"

"I've noticed—yes. It's the Tremonceau woman."

"The—"

"The most beautiful *cocotte* in Paris, my poor Jeremy. Thank God, *you* have to be *told* these things! It's the old story, no more admirable because, this time, it's a friend of ours who's making a fool of himself. If I had my way, I'd have sign-boards stuck up at every gate of Paris, with a finger pointing inward, and the inscription 'Mud Garden. For Children Only.' Faugh!"

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"But you don't suppose—"

Mrs. Carnby faced her husband, her hands upon her hips, assuming a kind of brazen effrontery.

"I don't suppose, Jeremy Carnby, that a Paris *cocotte* affects the company of a rich young American for the sake of his *beaux yeux*. I don't suppose that a good-looking boy in his twenties affects the company of Mirabelle Tremonceau for the pleasures of her conversation. I don't suppose that the loveliest and purest girl on earth is going to survey with emotion the unspeakable folly of the man she cares for. And I don't suppose the man she cares for is likely to be any different from the majority of men, who decide upon marriage principally because they're tired of the other thing. I don't suppose *anything* except what's logical, and natural—and perfectly disgusting!"

"Do you mean—Vane?" asked Jeremy.

"Yes—*bat!*" said Mrs. Carnby.

Jeremy wisely made no reply.

So it was that when, at the end of the three weeks, Mr. Thomas Radwalader came down to spend the day, he found his hostess in a fine glow of suppressed impatience. She seized the first moment when they were alone to question him. They were old friends. He never laid claim to much in the way of morality in the presence of Mrs. Carnby, and it is a characteristic of this attitude that the person adopting it is frequently his own worst critic, and has more credit allowed to him than he deserves. Even the devil is not so black as he is painted, and if he will have the audacity to do most of the painting in question himself, he is more than likely to find that, in the opinion of others, his complexion will be comfortably free from blemishes. Radwalader's smooth assumption of an indefinite kind of laxity, set at ease rather than aroused Mrs. Carnby's suspicions of him.

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"He can't be so *very* bad," she told herself, "or he wouldn't talk so much about it."

For unnecessary admissions are a sedative to gossip, just as unnecessary concealments are a stimulant.

"How's Mr. Vane?" demanded Mrs. Carnby abruptly.

"Why, I was about to ask you," answered Radwalader. "I thought he was quite a *protégé* of yours. I've not seen much of him, myself, of late. He's made new friends, and of course I was never much more than a preliminary guide to Paris. I fancy he can find his own way about, nowadays."

"I'll warrant he can!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnby, "and into society none too good, at that!"

"How so?"

"Oh, don't tell me you don't know what I mean! Of course, you're bound to shield him. You men always do that, don't you? You put your intoxicated friends to bed, and send discreet telegrams to

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their wives, to say they've been called out of town on business. That's not forgery—it's friendship. And when one of you's going to the bad, the rest of you stand around and say: 'Poor old chap! Don't let his family suspect what *we* know.' Oh, I wasn't born yesterday, Radwalader! You may as well tell me what I want to know: it isn't much. Is he still trotting about with that Tremonceau woman?"

"Now, Mrs. Carnby!" protested Radwalader. "Is that a fair question?"

"Perhaps not," said Mrs. Carnby dryly, "but you've answered it already, so never mind! Let me tell you that I'm quite through with Andrew Vane. He didn't even have the grace to answer a telegram that Margery Palffy sent him, three weeks ago, asking him to come down."

"Three weeks ago?" repeated Radwalader reflectively. "But, Mrs. Carnby, he was here three weeks ago. We all were—don't you remember?"

"Naturally I remember," said Mrs. Carnby impatiently, "but there were urgent reasons for his return. Now, don't tell me you don't know *that!*"

"Know it? How *should* I know it? Vane doesn't confide his private affairs to me. Do you mean that—"

"I mean that Margery had made a great mistake, in the course of a conversation they had on the last evening he was here—a mistake which imperilled the happiness of them both, and which it was of the utmost importance to set right. At the time, perhaps, he showed himself to be the victim of an unjust accusation; but since, he has shown himself to be a cad. If you've never known—but I'd not have believed it of you—that Margery was in love with him, and that he's pretended to be in love with her, then it's time you did!"

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"What a pity!" observed Radwalader. "I wish I'd known all this before: I might have done something. But, after all, it's just as well. It wouldn't have done for Miss Palffy to humiliate herself; and the little Tremonceau—"

"Is his mistress?" put in Mrs. Carnby.

"Of course," said Radwalader, with a skilful sigh. "There's no doubt whatever about that."

"I'd have wagered a good bit on his innocence!"

"When you wager anything on the innocence of a young man who's been the close companion of Mirabelle Tremonceau for six weeks or so," answered Radwalader, "it's nothing less than a criminal waste of money."

"Then he's not only a cad," said Mrs. Carnby angrily, "but a liar as well; and, as I've said already, I'm through with him!"

She was more than astounded when, two mornings later, a telegram was handed her at the breakfast-table. It was from Andrew, and requested permission to come down at once and spend one night.

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"I think I'll leave you to answer that," she observed to Margery, who was alone with her at table, Jeremy having gone up to town by the early train. "The boy's waiting."

She tossed the despatch across the table as she spoke.

She was more astounded still when Margery looked up at her with the first spontaneous smile which Mrs. Carnby had seen upon her lips for many days.

"Please ask him to come," she said.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnby, "*do* be careful! Remember how much has happened. If only you'd let me advise you!"

"You've advised me once already, fairy godmother," said Margery, laughing.

"Heaven help me, so I have!" replied her hostess. "Do you mean it, Margery?"

"I was never more in earnest," answered the girl, turning suddenly grave again.

So Mrs. Carnby sent the required answer.

All that morning she was more puzzled than ever she had been in the whole course of her life. It was certain that the girl's mood had changed. The doubtful shadow in her eyes had given place to a clear glow of confidence, and her laugh was free from any suggestion of restraint. That in itself was curious. Depression, melancholy, even resentment, were to be expected as a result of the news that Andrew Vane was on the point of entering her life once more. Of late he had shown himself in a more unfavourable light than ever, and yet in her eyes, her smile, her light-hearted animation there was something akin to a suggestion that he had been fully exonerated from suspicion, rather than freshly and more significantly subjected to it. She was emphatically happy—and Mrs. Carnby could not comprehend. The thought, indeed, came to her that the explanation which Andrew had denied her, these three weeks past, had been given to Margery, in some fashion as yet unexplained. But this theory was wholly incompatible with his bearing when he arrived at noon. He looked wretchedly ill, and was prey to a visible embarrassment. He took her hand, but did not meet her eyes, and the credit she was beginning to accord him gave way, once more, to anger. As a result, her greeting was conspicuously cool. After dinner he and Margery played billiards, while Jeremy dozed, with the *Temps* over his placid face, and Mrs. Carnby did more to ruin a piece of embroidery than she had done to further it in the past six months. Suddenly the good lady retired to her room, with a violent and fortuitous headache. She had relinquished any attempt to fathom the situation: she had frankly thrown up the sponge!

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"Shall we take a walk in the garden?" asked Andrew.

When they were alone with the silence and the stars, his hand sought hers.

"Margery!"

"Andy!"

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"I've simply come to say good-by, my dear. You were quite right: I'm not worthy of you. I'm going back to the States as soon as I can get away. All I want you to remember is this: I've been careless—reckless—wholly at fault from the beginning to the end—but I've loved you always, my dearest—always—always! I won't go into all the miserable details. Paris has made a fool of me, that's all. I'm not the first idiot to throw away his chance of happiness because of the big city over there, and I'm not the first to pay the penalty I deserve. Once, perhaps, I had the right to demand something at your hands; but now I've no right to ask for anything. I ask for nothing! I've come to beg for your forgiveness, and to say good-by. Will you forgive me, Margery?"

"I want to ask you just one question," said Margery steadily. "When I accused you of—of *that*—the other night, was I right or wrong?"

"Wrong," said Andrew Vane; "but now—"

Suddenly she leaned toward him, stopping his speech with her soft and open palm.

"I've thought of another question," she said. "Do you love me—now?"

"Love you?" answered Andrew. "Ah, Margery!"

"Then I wish to hear no more. The past is the past, do you hear? I love you! I've learned much in these few weeks. I love you, and I need you. You can't leave me now. I've been so weary for you, my love! Ah, whatever there has been between us in the past, don't let anything stand between us now!"

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"But you don't understand," faltered Andrew. "Things have changed. There is much that you have to forgive me—much that I have to explain—"

"As to what I have to forgive you," answered Margery, "I think there is also much for you to forgive me; and as to what you have to explain—oh, explain it later, Andy—explain it, if you like, when we—"

"Are married!" exclaimed Andrew. "No! Things must be made clear now. I've transgressed, my love—transgressed beyond hope of forgiveness. What would you say if you knew—?"

"I know already!" answered the girl. "I know more than you think—and I forgive it all. Oh, Andy, *don't* make it too hard for me! Help me—won't you?"

Suddenly, with a realization of what all this meant, he opened his arms, as to a child, and, like a confiding child, she went into them.

"I love you," she whispered. "That's all—I love you!"

"My love—my love—*my love!*" said Andrew.

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## CHAPTER XX.

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### THE SHADOW.

Your most astute strategist is the general ready, at any stage of the campaign, to authorize a complete change of plan, if the circumstances call for it, and to make for the end in view along wholly altered lines. The Braddocks of warfare are those who at all hazards persist in the course at first laid out.

Radwalader, contrary to his custom, did not leave his apartment until mid-afternoon of the following day. He carried a valise, and stopped for a moment on the step to snuff the fresh air with appreciation. Then he said "Psst!" and the yellow cab which was standing at the corner of the avenue squeaked into motion and drew up at the kerb.

"Gare St. Lazare," said Radwalader briefly. He flung his valise upon the seat, climbed in after it, put one foot on the *strapontin* to steady himself, and plunged, with a grin of amusement, into the latest number of *Le Rire*. He could afford a few moments of sheer frivolity: for he had just finished eight hours of careful reflection, and his plans were quite complete.

The driver of the yellow cab had only grunted in reply, but he drove briskly enough, once they were under way. Though the day was warm, he wore his fawn-coloured coat, with the triple cape, and had turned up the collar about his ears. His white cockaded hat, a size too large, was tipped forward over his nose, and between it and his coat-collar, in the back, showed a strip of bright red hair. For features, he had a nobbly nose, with a purple tinge, and a mustache like a red nail-brush.

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From time to time Radwalader looked up from his reading to remark their progress, and invariably he smiled. The Place de l'Etoile, freshly sprinkled, and smelling refreshingly of cool wet wood; the omnibus and tramway stations, with their continual ebb and flow of passengers seeking numbers; the stupendous dignity of the Arc, and the preposterous insignificance of three Englishwomen staring up at it, with their mouths open, and Baedekers in their hands; the fresh green of the chestnuts on the Avenue de Friedland; the crack of a teamster's whip, and his "*Ahi! Houp!*" of encouragement to the giant gray stallions, toiling up the steep incline of the Faubourg St. Honoré; the crowds of women at Félix Potin's, pinching the fat fowls, and stowing parcels away in netted bags; the "shish-shish-shish" of an infantry company shuffling at half-step toward the gateway of La Pépinière; the people *terrassé* before the restaurants on the Place du Havre—it was all very amusing, very characteristic, very *Parigot*. More than ever, Radwalader felt that he needed it all, that he must have it at any price, that life would not be worth living else or elsewhere. Fortunately, there was no reason for a change, so long as he kept his wits. Indeed his prospects were brighter now than they had ever been.

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Once a bridal carriage whirled past him, all windows, and with a lamp at each corner, and a red-faced quartette inside; and other carriages followed, full of exultant guests, whose full-dress costumes, in this broad daylight, were, to his Saxon sense, as incongruous as a Welsh rabbit on a breakfast-table—all bowling across to the Champs, and so away to the Restaurant Gillet. Again, it was a glimpse of a funeral moving up to a side door of St. Augustin, with an abject little band of mourners trailing along on foot, behind the black and purple car; again, nothing more than a sally between an *agent* and a ragamuffin at a crossing—"Ouste, galopin!" "Eh, 'spèce de balai! As-tu vu la ferme?"—or a driver's injunction to his horse—"Tu prends donc racine, saucisse"—or a girl's laugh, or the squawk of a tram-horn, or the cries of the *camelots*—"Voyez l'Parispor! Voici la Parresse! Voyez l'D-rrr-oi 'd'l'homme!" The importance of the phenomenon was not significant. It was all Paris, and Thomas Radwalader was very glad to be alive. When he left the yellow cab in the Cour du Hâvre, the driver had fifty centimes *pourboire*, though it was not like his passengers to go beyond three sous.

Trivial as this circumstance was, it apparently had a strangely demoralizing effect upon the driver of the yellow cab. He drew on for perhaps twenty feet, and then deliberately clambered down from his box, and followed his late *client* to the ticket office, at the foot of the eastern stairway. Here, with some ingenuity, he remarked, "*Même chose.*"

"Poissy *première*?"

"Oui."

In the first-class carriage of the Poissy train, a little, oblong pane of glass, above Radwalader's head, enabled him, had he been so minded, to glance into the next compartment—enabled the single occupant of the next compartment, who *was* so minded, to glance, as they started, into his.

In the Cour du Hâvre an infuriated *agent* apostrophized the deserted vehicle:

"*Sale sous-les-pieds!* He amuses himself elsewhere, then, *ton drôle!*"

The which was strictly true.

As the train rumbled through the illuminated tunnel, the driver of the yellow cab did a number of things with the most surprising rapidity and decision. He threw his varnished white hat out of the window, and followed it immediately with his triple-caped overcoat. He stripped off his fawn-coloured trousers, thereby revealing the unusual circumstance that he wore two pairs—one of corduroy. The latter hurtled out into the smoky tunnel, in the wake of the hat and coat, and the climax was capped by a like disappearance of the red hair, the nail-brush mustache, and the nobbly nose. Then Monsieur Jules Vicot smoothed his workman's blouse, dragged a Tam-o'-shanter from his pocket, pulled it down over his eyes, settled the scarlet handkerchief at his throat, threw himself back on the cushions, and lit a cigarette with hands that trembled excessively.

At Poissy Radwalader alighted, and swung rapidly away, across the *place*, in the direction of the Villa Rossignol. At Poissy the other also alighted, strolled over to the Hôtel de Rouen, and, in the company of a slowly consumed *matelote* and four successive absinthes, dozed, pondered, smoked—and waited for the dark.

That morning Margery and Andrew had told Mrs. Carnby. For an instant the good lady faced Andrew, her eyes blazing with inquiry. He met their challenge serenely.

"Won't you congratulate me," he asked, smiling—"and the only girl in the world?"

"The *only* girl in the world?" demanded Mrs. Carnby audaciously.

"Yes—just that."

Mrs. Carnby pounced upon Margery.

"Of *course* I congratulate you! You dear! And, as for *you*," she added, whirling upon Andrew once more, "you're the luckiest man I know—except Jeremy! And you've worried me almost into a decline. I thought you'd never get her—I mean, I thought she'd never get you—I don't know *what* I mean, Andrew Vane! Go along in, both of you, and sing about your roses and jugs of wine and nightingales and moons of delight. I can see that's all you'll be good for, from now on!"

And so, shamelessly, they did—all over again, from "Wake! for the Sun" to "flown again, who knows!"

"It's tied up in double bow-knots with our hearts, all this 'Persian Garden' music," said Andrew. "Do you remember how we used to rave over it at Beverly? And I loved you even then—from the first night."

Standing behind him, Margery touched his hair.

And so evening came again, drenched in starlight and rose-perfume, and stirring rapturously to the voice of the nightingale.

"I want to speak to you."

Radwalader touched Andrew's arm as they rose from the table, and led the way directly through the open window into the garden, and, through the garden gate, into the Avenue Meissonier beyond. Once there, he fell back a step, so that they were side by side.

"Let's walk toward the river," he suggested, taking Andrew's arm.

A single lamp swung at the archway of the railroad bridge, but along the villa walls and under the trees of the Boulevard de la Seine beyond, the shadows were very dark. Once, as they passed a poplar, one shadow disengaged itself from the trunk, and at a distance followed them. A little ahead was the gaily illuminated terrace of L'Esturgeon, overhanging the river, and crowded with people dining and talking all at once.

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"I saw Mirabelle yesterday," observed Radwalader. "It seems you're off scot-free."

"Did *she* tell you that?" asked Andrew in surprise.

"No—only that you'd parted company for good and all. I guessed the rest. I thought you'd hardly be so foolish as not to consult me, if the question of money came up."

"Thank the Lord, the episode was free from *that* element of vulgarity, at all events!" exclaimed Andrew. "Yes, it's over. It wasn't easy, Radwalader. I was surprised to find how much she thought of me. But, of course, there was nothing else to do. In any event, the thing couldn't have gone on for ever, and when I heard about that telegram, I couldn't ring down the curtain too soon. But it hurt. Poor little girl! I'll always think kindly of her, Radwalader, although she came near to losing me the only thing in the world that's worth while. Well, we said good-by, and I came down here just on the chance that it mightn't be too late. It was a thin-enough chance, to my way of thinking, in view of the past three weeks. By Gad, here was I deserving the worst kind of a wiggling that ever a man got, and lo and behold, it was the prodigal son after all! Mrs. Carnby was the first to congratulate me. Will you be the next?"

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"Do you mean that Miss Palffy is going to marry you?" asked Radwalader, coming to a full stop.

"Just that," said Andrew; "though why she should, after all this—"

"Oh, rot!" laughed the other. "You've been no worse than other men, and so long as you've owned up—"

"We'll never agree on the question of whether I deserve her or not," put in Andrew. "Never in the whole course of my life shall I forgive myself this folly. But we won't talk of that. The fact remains that I'm forgiven, and that she's going to marry me. Oh, *Gawd!*"

He looked up at the sky and bit his lip. He was desperately shy of slopping over, and, for a moment, desperately near to it.

Presently he continued. They had rounded L'Esturgeon now, and were walking along the southern side of the Pont de Poissy, close to the rail. Radwalader's pieces were all in place for the opening of the new game.

"When a chap's only been pulled out of a horrible mess by the merest chance, and when, into the bargain, he's been engaged to the one-and-only for something under twenty-four hours, he is apt to do considerable slobbering. I hope you'll give me credit for sparing you all I *might* say, Radwalader, when I confine myself to saying that I'm in luck."

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"And that, you most certainly are," said Radwalader cheerfully. "I'm glad you're so well out of your scrape, Vane, and I congratulate you heartily." A pressure of his fingers on Andrew's arm lent the phrase the emphasis of a hand-shake. "Miss Palffy is charming—so clean and straight, and, to say nothing of her beauty, with such high standards. To be quite frank with you, I'm a bit surprised that you got off so easily. But, since you have, there's nothing to be said, except that she's a stunner, and I can understand now how much all this has meant to you. What a thing to have standing between you, eh? If Mirabelle *had* been ugly, I fancy you'd have paid her about anything she chose to ask."

"If I'd been *sure* of getting Margery!" said Andrew.

"Of course—yes. That's what I mean. With Miss Palffy as an object, there could scarcely be a limit to the hush-money one would put up to clear away any obstacles that might exist."

"I expect not," said Andrew nervously. "I couldn't lose her now—I simply couldn't. It would kill me."

"I once knew of such a case," said Radwalader musingly. "Chap just about to marry the girl, and he found out that there was something very crooked about his birth—that he was illegitimate, in fact. The father hung on to him like an octopus and bled him like a leech. But the—er—girl never knew."

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"It was worth it to him," commented Andrew, "if he'd have lost the girl else."

"I've forgotten what he paid," said Radwalader, "but I know it was pretty stiff—in the form of a regular allowance by the year."

"Was the chap rich?" asked Andrew. He was looking down the river, and taking great breaths of the delicious night air, thrilling with the memory of Margery waiting back there for him; and his part in the conversation was little more than automatic.

"Reasonably," said Radwalader. "Enough to stand the strain. Curious old house, this—isn't it?"

He paused, and leaned upon the railing of the bridge.

"The plaster's rotten as possible," answered Andrew after a moment, during which he had been hacking boyishly at it with his knife.

"You know both sides of the bridge were lined with houses once," said Radwalader. "Picturesque it must have been! This is the only one left, and it doesn't look as if it could keep from toppling over into the river very much longer. Lord! how fast the water runs down there! It's a veritable mill-race. I shouldn't care to have to swim against it."

He hesitated deliberately, and then continued, with a slight change of tone:

"There's something I want to tell you, Vane. I didn't care to bother you with it as long as you were worrying on your own account, but now—confidence for confidence. The fact of the matter is that I need money, and need it badly."

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Andrew pursued his hacking.

"If that's all that's troubling you," he said, "I can probably make you a loan that will tide you over. I'll be very glad to, if I can. How much do you need?"

A workman slouched past them, his hands in the pockets of his corduroy trousers, his tam o'

shanter pulled down over his eyes.

"No," said Radwalader, "I don't want to borrow; I might never be able to repay. But suppose I were to give you a piece of information—a tip—that was of the very greatest importance to you, mightn't it be worth a small sum?"

Andrew stared at him curiously.

"I don't understand," he said. "Do you mean that you know something that is very important to me?"

"Vastly important."

"And that is known to no one else?"

"To one other person only."

"And that you want to *sell* to me?"

"That I want to *tell* you. You can do as you see fit about paying me for it. I think you will, but if not—"

He smiled evilly, secure of the darkness.

"There are other ways of utilizing it," he added.

Andrew chopped thoughtfully at the plaster.

"I don't seem to understand what you're driving at," he said presently, "but, somehow—well, I don't like the sound of it, Radwalader. Of course, I know you don't mean it that way, but it sounds rather—rather unfriendly, if you'll allow me to say so. Oh, *damn* it all!"

"What?" asked Radwalader, surprised at the sudden exclamation.

"There goes my knife. I ought to have known better than to hew at this stuff with it. I suppose that's the last I shall ever see of it—and a new one, too. Why—that's queer! Did you notice? There wasn't any splash."

He peered over the rail.

"Hello!" he added, "here's a ladder—leading down."

"There's a little garden down there," explained Radwalader, peering over in his turn. "I remember now. It's on part of the foundations of another old house, and the chap who lives in this one grows flowers there, oddly enough, and goes up and down on the ladder. Your knife's down there, somewhere. Jove! but it's dark!"

But Andrew already had one leg across the railing, one foot on the top round of the ladder.

"This is easy," he said, "and I have my match-box, too. You see—well, Margery bought the knife only this morning in the bazar, and I wouldn't lose it for the world. And, by the way, Radwalader, forget what I said just now, will you? It wasn't very decent."

Then, with a short laugh of embarrassment, he descended into the shadows.

The shadows! They were very deep below there, until broken by the flicker of Andrew's match. Then the shadows under the doorway of the old house, up by the top of the bridge, were deeper, and—what was this?—one shadow moved—moved—drew near to the man who leaned upon the rail, whistling "Au Clair de la Lune."

"All right!" called Andrew. "I have it. Now we come up again."

"Go slow," advised Radwalader. "You'll find it darker than ever, after the match. Why—what—"

A hand on his shoulder had spun him round, but he had no more than recognized the white face grinning into his, no more than time to comprehend the words, "You've whistled for the last time, by God!" before the steel-shod butt of a revolver crashed three times in succession on—and through—his forehead.

"*Once for me!*" said Jules Vicot, between his teeth, "*and once for my wife, and once for your son!*"

He hurled Radwalader from him, ran a few feet, turned at the rail to see the smitten man writhing and groping blindly on the cobbles of the driveway, and then, emptying the entire contents of the revolver in his direction, vaulted with a laugh into the swirling Seine below.

The guilty river caught him, hid him, hurried him away. Only once he moved of his own volition, and then she laid her brown hand on his mouth and stilled him, once for all. Around the wide curves of her course, he was to go, through the thrashing locks of Les Mureaux and Notre Dame de la Garenne, past Les Andelys and Pont de l'Arche, and the high quays of Elbeuf, and the twinkling lights of Rouen, and the vineyards and the poplars and the red-roofed villages—on, on, on, to where the lights of Le Havre and Honfleur wink, each to each, across the widened channel. For such was the course appointed whereby the most pitiful shadow that ever fell from Poissy Bridge should make its way to sea.

Back there was the sound of many voices and of running feet. Radwalader lay with his head on Andrew's arm, his eyes closed, and his breath coming in short hard gasps. The first arrivals from the town were three young Englishmen, who had been dining at L'Esturgeon, were on their way to the station, and outran all others at the sound of the five shots. One of them proved to be a medical student, and fell at once to making an examination, while the others held back the crowd.

"How did it happen?" he asked. "What was it all about?"

"God knows!" said Andrew. "I'd been down the ladder there to look for a knife I'd dropped, and I was just coming up again when I heard him call out, and then a scuffle and the sound of blows, and then the firing. I think whoever shot him jumped into the river. There was a big splash just as I came up to the level of the bridge."

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"Yes," said the other. "We heard that from the street, just as we started to run. God! how that blackguard piled it on! Look here—his head's all pushed in, and he's shot in at least two places. I'm afraid the poor chap's done for. Hello! he's coming to."

Radwalader slowly opened his eyes, and after a moment seemed striving to speak. Andrew bent down, wiping away the blood.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is there something you want to say, dear old man?"

Without replying, Radwalader glanced eloquently at the Englishman, and, at this mute signal, the latter stepped back.

"What is it?" whispered Andrew. "Do you want to tell us who it was?"

Radwalader shook his head.

"Is it what you were going to tell me a few minutes ago?" asked Andrew, with a kind of intuition.

For a full half-minute, the dying man's eyes were fixed upon the eager, solicitous face that bent so close to his—upon the earnest eyes so curiously like and yet unlike his own, upon the white teeth showing between the parted lips, upon the straight patrician nose and the smooth clear complexion. Then, with a singular smile, a smile almost affectionate in its sweetness:

"It's of no consequence now," he murmured.

He raised one hand, and gently touched Andrew on the cheek.

"Good-by, my boy," he added, more feebly.

His head fell limply, and he shuddered once, and then was very still.

A moment later, Andrew laid him back upon the driveway, and covered his face.

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THE END.

[Transcriber's notes:  
Some inconsistent spellings and hyphenations have been retained.]

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TRANSGRESSION OF ANDREW VANE: A  
NOVEL \*\*\*

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