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Kauffman**

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**RUNNING SANDS**

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**RUNNING SANDS**

**BY**

**REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN**

AUTHOR OF

"The House of Bondage," "The Sentence of Silence," etc.

NEW YORK  
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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To  
**BRUNER KAUFFMAN**  
Brother and Friend

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**PREFACE**

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony....

"It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name....

"It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continence might marry, and keep themselves undefiled....

"It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other....

"Into which holy estate these two persons come now to be joined...."

—The Book of Common Prayer.

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## RUNNING SANDS

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### I

#### "WON'T YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOUR?"

Stainton decided that he would go to the Metropolitan Opera House that night to hear *Madama Butterfly*. He did not care for operatic music, but he hoped to learn. He did not expect to meet anyone he knew, but he trusted that he might come to know someone he met. There was, at any rate, no spot in the Great American Desert, where he had found his fortune, quite so lonely as this crowded lobby of the Astor, the hotel at which he was now stopping—so he decided upon the Metropolitan and *Madama Butterfly*.

A page was passing, uttering shrill demands for a man whose name seemed to be "Mr. Kerrghrrr." Stainton laid a large, but hesitating, hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Where can I buy a ticket for to-night's opera?" he enquired.

The page ceased his vocal rumble and looked up with wounded reproof at the tall cause of this interruption.

"News-stand," he said, and immediately escaped to resume the summons of "Mr. Kerrghrrr."

Stainton followed the direction that the page's eyes had indicated. Over the booth where newspapers might be purchased for twice the price that he would have to pay for them in the street, fifteen yards away, he saw a sign announcing the fact that opera and theatre tickets were here for sale. He approached, somewhat awkwardly, and, over a protruding ledge of red and blue covered magazines on which were portrayed the pink and white prettiness of impossibly insipid girls, confronted a suave clerk, who appeared tremendously knowing.

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"You have tickets for the opera?" asked Stainton.

"Yessir."

"For the Metropolitan Opera House?"

"Yessir. How many?"

"There are——It's *Madama Butterfly* to-night, I think the paper said?"

"Yessir. What part of the house do you want?"

"I don't know," said Stainton. "That's a good show, isn't it?"

The clerk was too well fitted for his business to smile at such a query. He had, besides, perception enough to discern something beyond the humorous in this broad-shouldered, grave man of anywhere from forty to fifty, who was evidently so strong in physique and yet so clearly helpless in the commonplaces of city-life.

"It's the best production of that opera for the whole season," the clerk made answer. "Caruso sings *Pinkerton* and——"

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"So I understand," said Stainton, quickly.

The clerk nimbly shifted the quality of his information.

"And anyhow," he went urbanely on, "the Metropolitan audience is always a show in itself, you know. Everybody that is anybody is there; for a steady thing it beats the Horseshow in Madison Square Garden. You'll be wanting seats in the orchestra, of course?"

"One," corrected Stainton. "Shall I?" he added.

"Oh, yes. That is, if you're a stranger in New York. I——Pardon me, sir, but I suppose you are a stranger?"

"Very much of a stranger."

"Then I can recommend this seat, sir." The clerk disappeared behind a hanging vine of magazines more glorious than the slopes of the Côte d'Or in autumn, and immediately reappeared with a ticket projecting from a narrow envelope. "Fifth row," he said. "Second from the aisle. Not on the side with the brasses, either. You can see all the boxes from it."

Jim Stainton's heavy, iron-grey eyebrows came together in a puzzled meeting. Under them, however, his iron-grey eyes twinkled.

"Thank you," he said; "but I want to see the stage, you know."

"Oh," the clerk reassured him, "of course you'll see the stage perfectly."

Stainton accepted the ticket.

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"Very well," he said. "Take it out of that."

For many a hard year he had been used, by compulsion of desperate circumstance, to counting his two-bit pieces, and now, precisely because all that had passed, he enjoyed sharply the luxury of counting nothing, not even the double-eagles. He laid a yellow-backed bill on the glass counter and received, without regarding it, the change that the now thoroughly deferential clerk deftly returned to him. Doubtless he was paying a heavy commission to the hotel's ticket-agent; perhaps he was obtaining less change than, under the terms of that commission, he was entitled to; but certainly about none of these things did he care. Toil had at last granted him success, toil and good luck; and success had immediately given him the right to emancipation from financial trifling. There are two times in a man's life when no man counts its cost: the time of his serious wooing and that of his ultimate illness. Stainton had come to New York with a twofold purpose; he had come to bury the man that he had been, and he had come to woo.

He went to his elaborate rooms to dress. For the last decade and more, he had not worn evening-clothes a score of times, and he now donned the black suit, fresh from a Fifth Avenue tailor's shop, with a care that was in part the result of this scant experience and in part the consequence of a fear of just how ridiculous the new outfit would make him seem. He endangered the shirt when he came to fasten it; he was sure that he had unnecessarily wrinkled the white waistcoat, and the tie occupied his bungling fingers for a full five minutes.

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His apprehensions, nevertheless, were unjustified. Something, when the toilet was completed, rather like a man of fashion appeared to have been made by the man of the needle out of the man of the pick: if the miner had not wholly vanished, at least the familiar of Broadway had joined him. Stainton, critically surveying himself in the pier-glass and secretly criticising his attitude of criticism, saw nothing that, to his unaccustomed and therefore exacting eye, presented opportunity for objection. The figure was heavier, more stalwart than, as he had been told, was for that season the mode, but the mode, that season, exacted a slimness that indicated the weakling. The clothes themselves were, on the other hand, perfection and to the point of perfection they fitted. The face—

Jim Stainton, with suspended breath, drew the hanging electric-lamp nearer, leaned forward and

studied the reflection of that face closely.

He saw a large, well-proportioned head, the head of a man serious, perhaps, but admirably poised. The black hair was only sparsely sprinkled with gray. The deep line between the thick brows might be the furrow of concentration rather than the mark of years. The rugged features—earnest eyes of steel, strong nose, compressed lips and square, clean-shaven chin—were all features that, whatever the life they had faced, betokened stamina from the beginning. Hot suns had burnished his cheeks, but a hard career had entailed those abstinences which are among the surest warders of youth. Experience had strengthened, but time had been kind.

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"I am still young," he thought. "I am fifty, but I don't look forty, and I have the physique of twenty-five."

He walked to the window and flung it wide.

Below him swirled the yellow evening life of the third greatest among the world's great thoroughfares. Looking down from the height of his hotel was to Stainton like looking down upon a riverside furnace through its roof. Molten streams, swelling from the darker channels to the north, flowed along their appointed alleyways and broke and divided, hissing and spluttering against the pier that was the Times Building. And as the steam rises from the red waste that runs from the furnace into the river, there now rose to Stainton's desert-starved ears the clanging of cable-cars, the rattle of carriages, the tooting of the purring motors—all the humming chorus of the night-wakeful thing that men call New York.

He stretched his arms apart to it. He wanted to enfold it, to inhale its breath, to mix with it and become lost in it. He had come back. After all these years, he had come back, and he had come back a victor unscarred.

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"I'm still young," he repeated, raising his head and spreading his nostrils to the damp air of the city-evening. And "Still young!" he continued to whisper on his way down in the elevator and through the crowded dining-room to his seat at a glittering table.

A ready waiter detached himself from a group of his fellows and dexterously steered a rapid course, between seated diners and laden serving-tables, to Stainton's broad shoulder.

Stainton was studying, with less difficulty than he had anticipated, the menu.

"Soup, sir?" suggested the waiter.

"Yes; consommé," said Stainton.

"And a little fish, sir?"

"No, thank you; no fish."

"Those bass are very nice, sir. I can recommend them."

"No, thank you, I think not. I want a steak, sirloin."

"Rare, sir?"

"Medium."

"Yes, sir. And shall we say potatoes *au gratin*?"

"No. Boiled potatoes. And French peas."

"A little cauliflower with sauce *Hollandaise*?"

"No. Only the steak, potatoes, and peas."

The waiter raised his brows ever so slightly.

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"And what salad, sir?" he asked.

"No salad, thank you."

"Er—and about dessert?"

"Nothing. After the meal you may bring me a demi-tasse."

The waiter suppressed surprise. A New Yorker may dine simply, but that a still obvious stranger in New York should dine upon less than five courses—that was beyond his experience.

"What cocktail, sir?" he enquired.

"None," said Stainton.

"Very good, sir. Shall I send the wine-card?"

"No."

Stainton spoke briefly this time, even sharply, and his tone had the effect that he desired for it. He ate his dinner undisturbed.

A more pleasant disturbance than that of the waiter was, however, in store for him. As he left the

dining-room and returned to the lobby, ready now for the opera, there brushed by him, *en route* from the bar-room, a stout man of about thirty-five, with a round face and a high hat perched at the extreme rear of a head almost completely bald.

The two looked at each other.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger.

"I beg your par——" Stainton began to echo.

But he did not finish, for the stranger, suddenly a stranger no longer, was fairly shouting:

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"Hello, hello, hello! What in the name of all that's——"

Stainton's lips broke into a delighted smile, which showed square, white teeth.

"Holt," he said: "George Holt!"

"Alive and well—thanks to you, old man." Holt seized the proffered hand and began to pump it. "And you!" he continued. "Think of it! *You!* I saw about your luck in the papers, and I meant to write. Upon my soul, I did. I don't know how it was I didn't——"

"Oh, that's all right."

"But I was glad. I never was so glad. And you're here—here in little old New York?"

"So it seems."

"For good? Of course it is. Everybody comes here to spend his money."

"Well, I hope it's not for harm."

Holt ceased pumping, dropped the hand, put both his hands on Stainton's shoulders, and held him at arm's length.

"Great Scott, but it's good to see you again," he said. "Five years, isn't it?"

"All of that."

"And then I was out there in the last of the Wild and Woolly, and we were sworn brother-adventurers and all that, and you saved my life——"

"Nonsense."

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"Yes, you did—saved my life, by the great horn spoon, just as the knife-claws of that big grizzly were raised to rip out what passes with me for a heart. I'll never forget it as long as I live."

Stainton wished it forgotten.

"How's the world treating you?" he asked.

"So, so; I mean, badly. In fact, it's not treating me at all; I have to pay for myself, and just enough to pay and none to save, at that. But you—you! Oh, you lucky beast, you!" He shook Stainton by the shoulders and again studied his smiling face. "Good old Jim!" he said.

Stainton's smile went somewhat awry.

"Old?" he echoed. "Oh, I don't know."

"What? No, of course not." Holt thrust a playful thumb between Stainton's ribs. "Young as ever, eh? So am I. Still, you know, time does pass. Oh, well, what of it? I certainly am glad to see you."

He hooked his arm into Stainton's. "Come on and have a drink."

"Thank you, no," said Stainton; "I scarcely ever take anything, you know."

Holt, unlike the waiter, showed his disapproval.

"I know you scarcely ever did out there." He jerked his round face in what he supposed was a westerly direction. "But that's over now. You don't have to be careful now. What's the good of being rich if you have to be careful?"

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"Still, I am careful," said Stainton, quietly.

"But on this occasion? Surely not on this occasion, Jim!"

The miner laughed freely now.

"You always were a wonder at discovering occasions, George," he said. "Your occasions were as frequent as saints' days and other holidays in a Mexican peon's calendar."

"And still are, thank the Lord. But to-night——Even you've got to admit to-night, Jim. It isn't every day in the year that a man that's saved my life turns up in New York with a newly discovered, warranted pure, gold mine in his pocket."

This was so clearly true that Stainton capitulated, or at least compromised by going to the bar and drinking a thimbleful of white-mint while Holt, chattering like a cheerful magpie—if a magpie

can be cheerful—consumed two long glasses of Irish whiskey with a little aerated water added.

Holt made endless plans for his friend. He would "put up" Stainton's name at his club. He would introduce him to this personage and to that. He would—

"Oh, by Jove, yes, and the women!" he interrupted himself. "You've got to go gently there, Jim."

A bright tint showed on Stainton's cheeks.

"I never——" he began.

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"Oh, not *them!*" said Holt, dismissing the entire half-world with a light gesture. "I know you didn't—the more fool you. But what I mean is the—you know: the all-righters. They'll be setting their caps at you worse than any of the other sort. You've got to remember that you're a catch."

This was all very pleasant, and Stainton was too honest with himself not to admit so much.

"Marriage," he admitted, "isn't beyond my calculations."

"Exactly. Now, you leave that little matter to me, Jim. I know——"

"I think that, if you don't much mind, I shall leave it to myself. There is no hurry, you see."

"Um; yes. I do see. But if there's no hurry, just you wait—just you wait, old man, till you have seen what I can show you. New York is the biggest bond-market and marriage-market in the world." He looked at his watch. "Hello," he said: "I'll be late. Now, look here: where'll you be after the opera? I've got to go there. I hate it, but I have to."

"The opera?" repeated Stainton. "The Metropolitan?"

"Yes, sure."

"But I'm going there myself."

"The devil you are. Where are you?"

Stainton produced his ticket.

Holt glanced at it and shook his head.

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"Too close to hear," he said. "But what's the difference? We've all heard the confounded thing so often——"

"I have not," said Stainton.

"Eh? What? But it's *Madama Butterfly*, you know—Oh, yes, of course: I forgot. Still, what'll interest you, once you get there, will be what interests everybody else—and that's not the stage and not the orchestra. Now, look here: I'm with the Newberrys, you know—the Preston Newberrys——"

"I don't know," said Stainton.

"Well, you will, my boy; you will. That's just the point. We'll call a taxi and motor there together—it's just a step to the Metropolitan—and then, after the first act, I'll come round to you and take you over to meet 'em. What do you say?"

Stainton said what he was expected to say, which was, of course, that he would be delighted to meet any friends of Holt, and so it befell that the two men went to the opera-house together and parted at the door only with the certainty of meeting soon again.

Yet, the miner was still glowing with the thrill of his new life. "I'm young!" he repeated to himself as he was shown to his seat. And he felt young. He felt that he had never yet lived and that he was now about to live; and he thanked Heaven that he had kept himself trained for the experience.

He had dined slowly, as befits a man that has earned his leisure, and his conversation with Holt had not been hurried. Consequently, when he reached his place, the first act of *Madama Butterfly* was already well over. With the voice of Apollo and the figure of an elephant, the tenor, bursting through the uniform of a naval officer with a corpulence that would endanger a battleship, was engaged in that vocal assault upon a fortress of heavy orchestration which is the penance of all that have to sing the rôle of "Pinkerton." Stainton listened and tried to enjoy. He listened until the curtain fell at length upon the beginning of the inevitable tragedy, until the lights flashed up about him, and he found himself looking straight into the eyes of a young girl in a lower box not thirty feet away.

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About him swept the broad curve of boxes that has been called "The Diamond Horseshoe," filled with wonderful toilettes and beautiful women, but Stainton did not see these. In the particular box toward which he was looking there were three other people: there was a matronly woman in what appeared to be brocade; there was a sleek, weary-eyed, elderly man, and there was another man faintly suggested in the background, as the lover of the mistress is faintly suggested in Da Vinci's masterpiece—but Stainton was no more conscious of this trio than he was of the gowns and women of the broad horseshoe. He saw, or was conscious of seeing, only that girl.

And she was leaning far over the rail, at pause where, when their eyes met, his intense gaze had

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arrested her: a young girl, scarcely eighteen years old, her delicate, oval face full of the joy of life, aglow with the excitement, the novelty of place, people, music. The light was upon her—upon her slim, softly white-clad body trembling at the unguessed portal of womanhood just as it trembled also under his gaze. She had wonderful hair, which waved without artifice, as blue-black as a thunder-cloud in May; she had level brows and eyes large and dark and tender. Her lips were damp, the lower one now timidly indrawn. While he looked at her, there awoke in Stainton the Neolithic man, the savage and poet that sang what he felt and was unashamed to feel and sing: she was like a Spring evening in the woods: warm and dusky and clothed in the light of stars.

Stainton did not move, yet his heart seemed twisting in his breast. Was he mad? Was he alive, sane, awake and in New York of to-day? If so, if he were himself, then were the old stories true, and did the dead walk? Sitting there, stonily, there floated through his brain a line from a well-conceived and ill-executed poem:

"At Paris it was, at the opera there ..."

The girl was the one to break the spell. When Stainton would have ceased looking, he could never know. But the girl flushed yet more deeply and turned away, with a quick movement that was almost a reprimand but not enough of a reprimand to be an acknowledgment that she was aware of him. [Pg 16]

Jim, his own cheeks burning at the realisation of his insolence, but his heart tumultuous for that other reason, himself started. He shifted clumsily in his chair and so became conscious of another movement in the box.

A man—the man that had been, at Stainton's first glimpse of the party, dimly outlined—was disentangling himself from the background, was bending forward to make vehement signs in Stainton's direction, was finally, and with no end of effort on Stainton's part, assuming recognisable shape. It was George Holt.

Holt waved his hand again and nodded toward the lobby. Then, as Stainton nodded a tardy comprehension, he faded once more into the background of the box.

They met a few moments later in the corridor.

"I see you found your friends," said Stainton. At least temporarily, he had regained his self-control.

"My who? Oh, the Newberrys? Of course. Come over; you must meet them."

"The Newberrys?" Stainton looked a misapprehension.

"Yes, I told you, you know. Good old Preston Newberry and his wife." [Pg 17]

"I thought," urged Stainton, "that I saw a girl——"

"Oh, *that*?" asked Holt, recollecting with some difficulty a person of such small importance. "That's their little Boston ward."

"What's her name?"

"Something or other. I forget. Stannard: that's it—Muriel Stannard. She's just out of her——"

He stopped and blinked, his narrow eyes directed at Stainton, who had lifted to his face a hand that visibly trembled.

"What's the trouble?" asked Holt. "Too used to the desert to stand our nifty opera-house air? Don't wonder. Come out and have a drink. Plenty of time."

"No," said Stainton. He achieved a smile. "I'm all right. Why in the world did you think I wasn't? I'm just——She's eighteen, isn't she?"

"Who? Mrs. New——Oh, the girl? Yes, I imagine she is about that. But she's an orphan and hasn't a cent and is too young to mix in, anyhow. Don't you bother: she won't interfere. Come along, if you won't have a drink, and meet the Newberrys. Mrs. Preston is every bit as good as a Bronx cocktail, though she wouldn't be seen in the Bronx for a thousand of 'em."

Stainton replied with compressed lips. [Pg 18]

"I should like to meet Miss—Miss Stannard," he said.

"Miss Stannard? The youngster?" Holt broke into a laugh. "Bless my soul! Why, she's not even out yet; and you mean to say——"

But Stainton's firm fingers had closed so sharply about Holt's arm that, while the pain of the unexpected grip shot through him, Holt's laughter ended in a gasp.

"Don't joke about this," commanded Stainton. "You remember that we used to be friends."

"Sure. Aren't we friends now? What's hit you, Jim? We're friends still, I hope. You don't think I'm likely to forget what you once did for me, do you?"

"Very well, then: don't joke about Miss Stannard."

"No offence intended," said the perplexed Holt; "but why in thunder shouldn't I joke about her?"

Stainton's grip loosened, and his eyes twinkled.

"After all," he said, "it must have seemed strange to you——"

"Strange? It looked like the asylum!" said Holt.

"And so," Stainton continued, "I dare say that I do owe you an explanation." He put out his hand again, but Holt dodged.

"No more of that!" said Holt.

"All right," Stainton answered. He laid a hand on Holt's shoulder. "Can you keep a secret, George?" [Pg 19]

The clubman blinked in anticipation.

"Seems to me we've had a few together," he said.

"Then," said Stainton, "I'll tell you why I was a little sensitive about comments on Miss Stannard: I am going to marry her."

---

## II

[Pg 20]

### YOUNG BLOOD

Holt's jaw fell.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered; "but I didn't know you even knew her."

"I have never met her," said Stainton.

"What? Oh, quit your jollying."

"I have never met her."

"Then—well, you *don't* need a drink, after all."

"After all—that is, after the performance," said Stainton, "I shall explain. Just now I want you to take me to your friends' box and present me all round."

Holt recalled having heard that certain of the Cæsars had been driven mad by their sudden acquisition of power. He recalled having read of stock-gamblers that went crazy when they achieved a great coup. He recalled having seen the Las Animas country, when the Las Animas country was really a prospectors' bedlam, one gold-seeker that had lost his wits in what were then the vast solitudes of the San Juan Triangle. All of these recollections rushed in detail through a brain warped by a few years of the most unnatural side of city life, and following them came the realisation, as the newspapers had brought it to him, of Stainton's unexpected success. Stainton had always, when Holt knew him in the West, been unlike his fellows, a man aloof. Stainton had once, Holt recollected, been practical, silent, slow; now, having come upon a gold mine after twenty-five years of adversity, in a country more desolate than the San Juan had ever been, this man was powerful, almost in a day, rich. He wondered if— [Pg 21]

But Stainton was once more smiling his old self-reliant smile.

"No," he was saying, "I am not crazy, and I am not drunk. It sounds queer, I know——"

"Sounds! Sounds——"

"But I am sane and sober. Come along and, honestly, I'll explain—later."

"You can't," said Holt.

"Can't what?"

"Explain. Such things can't be explained. This would balk Teddy himself."

Nevertheless, in the end Holt did what he was accustomed to doing, which is to say that he did as he was told, and before the curtain had risen again Stainton was in the agonies of the introduction.

"Mr. Holt has just been telling us of your splendid bravery and how you saved his life," said Mrs. Newberry.

She was a stout, uncertain nonentity, whose chief endeavours in her narrow world were to seem as slim as she would like to be and as certain of her social position as was proper for a woman of moderate antecedents, who had married a membership in Manhattan's three most difficult clubs. What, of course, she had been thinking was not at all about Stainton's bravery: it was, rather, that Stainton had become quite rich quite romantically, and that he was not the rough diamond which tradition demanded. [Pg 22]



Stainton took all this for granted and, knowing not what to say in reply, bowed and said nothing.

"Glad to know you," was what Newberry said: and he presently added: "The cast's in rotten voice to-night. Sit down."

Newberry, the sleek, weary-eyed elderly man, whom Stainton had barely noticed in his first survey of the box, was the membership in New York's three most difficult clubs. He had inherited money without brains, had sought to adjust matters by marrying brains without money, and had been intellectually disappointed.

To him in turn Stainton bowed in silence. His eyes were on the girl, and the girl's slim back was set resolutely toward him.

There was an awkward pause. Nobody seemed to remember Muriel. At length Holt, still in terror, blundered forward.

"Miss Muriel——" he began.

The girl turned. The glory of her warm eyes brushed Stainton's face and passed it.

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"I am Miss Stannard," she said. "It is good of you to join us. Do sit down, Mr. Stainton."

Stainton sat down. He sat down directly behind her, and at last, politely unencouraging though she at first managed to remain, he succeeded in gaining some sort of conversational opening.

What did he say there, for the early ten minutes of their talk? He was unable at any later date to recall one word of it. Everything, he was sure, that was clumsy. As a matter of fact, his own speech was probably by no means so uncouth as his torturing fancy declared it, hers by no means so brilliant as his memory, which retained no souvenirs, insisted. More likely than not, their talk fulfilled the requirements of convention. Convention requires the commonplace.

Nobody paid any but sporadic attention to the opera. To the left of the girl and Stainton, Mrs. Newberry and her husband, a Dido matched to a Don Juan, exchanged low monosyllables with each other and darting exchanges of talk, like rallies at badminton, with Holt. Sometimes they were ill-mannered enough to converse in whispers, near Stainton's shoulder, but mostly Mrs. Newberry was laboriously conventional, out of a constant fear of being adjudged plebeian, and now and again, to Stainton's huge disgust, she would lean to confer a word on her niece and her niece's companion.

"I hope you care for opera," she said to Stainton in one of these sallies.

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"I hope to," replied the miner, guardedly.

"Though of course," pursued Mrs. Newberry, "this is rather an off evening. The cast led us to expect so much, but they all seem to be in such poor voice."

Stainton made a civil noise.

"Apart from the music," his hostess continued, "I dare say that the stage doesn't appeal to you."

"I have had very little chance to know it," said Stainton, "but I am fond of it."

"Indeed?" Mrs. Newberry's tone indicated that she was mildly interested in meeting a tamed adventurer. "But I should suppose that it would all seem so false to you. It must seem false, I should think, to anyone that has known so much of—of Real Life, you know; and dear Mr. Holt has given us *such* descriptions of your romantic career."

Stainton's disavowal of this apparent praise of his career was earnest, but not convincing.

"My life has seemed dull to me," he said, with a deadly glance at dear Mr. Holt, grinning in the background.

Holt tried to change the subject.

"At all events, this is a romantic episode for you, isn't it?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" snapped Stainton.

"Oh," Holt hurried to explain, "all this." He indicated the audience with the sweep of a plump hand.

"It is new," granted Stainton.

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Holt edged his chair forward.

"Of course it is, and whatever's new's romantic. That's all romance is, isn't it, Miss Muriel?"

The girl had been listening to the music, her dark eyes, veiled by their long lashes, fixed on nothing.

"Is it?" she enquired.

"Sure it is," said Holt. "Now, Jim, you're in the crowd you read about. You ought to get us to point 'em out to you."

"The woman just next," whispered Mrs. Newberry—"the one in forget-me-not blue, draped with

chiffon and crystal trimmings—don't you see? The bodice is finished with crystal fringe—"

"I'm afraid—" said Stainton.

Preston Newberry explained.

"Girl with yellow hair," said he.

"Oh!" said Stainton.

"That," Mrs. Newberry went on, "is Dora van Rooz. She was a Huyghens, you know."

"I'm afraid I don't read the society-columns," Stainton apologised.

"Dora's not confining herself to them," said Newberry. "She and van Rooz are calling each other names in the divorce-court now."

"And just beyond," Mrs. Newberry ran on, "in the American beauty satin veiled in ninon—there: her waist is embroidered with beads and rows of silver lace; you can't see very well in this light." [Pg 26]

"Girl with the fine nose," Preston elucidated.

"I see."

"That's Mrs. Billy Merton. You must have heard of her. She divorced Clem Davis last month and married Billy the next day."

She rattled on for some time, ceasing her chatter only for brief pauses, at intervals unconsciously regulated by her long acquaintance with the opera and its finer moments. The strains of the beautiful music seemed to Stainton to be a loveliness unworthily draping, on the stage, the story of a base man's perfidy; and the pleasant indiscretions of the fashionable opera-gowns to be clothing, in the audience, none but women that had already stripped their souls in one or other of the scandalous rituals imposed by modern law for the dissolution of the most private of relationships.

He made but brief answers, and he was unfeignedly relieved when his poor responsiveness forced Mrs. Newberry to retreat and left him free again with Muriel. He looked frank admiration at her level brows, her dark eyes, and her full lips. Here, he assured himself, was innocence: her face was her young soul made visible.

Perhaps, as she pretended, it was his distress at her aunt's garrulity; for it must have been evident to her. Perhaps it was the dropped hint of his adventurous life; for women are all Desdemonas at heart. Perhaps it was only his patent worship of her beauty; since we are all assailable through this sort of compliment to whatever of our charms we are least responsible for. Perhaps it was all or none of these things. In any case, as Mrs. Newberry retired to a continuation of her gossip with Holt, broken only by the terser remarks of Newberry, Muriel bent a little closer to Stainton. [Pg 27]

"You don't care a bit about such things, do you?" she enquired.

Her tone was lower than when she had last spoken. It was low enough to draw the curtain of confidence between them and their companions, with that subtle quality that takes account of but one listener.

Stainton's pulses leaped.

"About what things?" was all that he was at first able to say.

The girl smiled. Stainton thought her smile wistful.

"The sort that fill these boxes," said Muriel: "the sort, I dare say, that uncle and aunt and Mr. Holt and I are."

He heard a shimmering sprite of regret in her voice: regret not that he did not care for these people, but that these people should be what they were.

"Don't include yourself in this lot," he answered.

He was immediately aware that his reply was scarcely courteous to his hosts, and so was she.

"You are hard on them," she said.

"Hadn't you just been hard on them, too?" he countered.

"Ah, yes, but they are my relatives. At least Uncle Preston and Aunt Ethel are. Family criticism is permitted everywhere." [Pg 28]

He did not like her schoolgirlish attempt at epigram, and he showed his disapproval.

"Now you are trying to be of a piece with them," he said.

The glance that she gave him was no longer calm: there was a flash of flame in it.

"You talk as if you had known me for years."

"For thirty years."

"Yes?" She did not understand.

"I have known you for thirty years."

What sort of man was this? "But I am only eighteen," she said.

"Nevertheless, I have known you for thirty years."

She gave an empty glance at her programme.

"Since you were in pinafores," she said, still looking down.

Stainton bit his lip. There had been no malice in her tone, yet all children are cruel, he reflected, and the modern child's cruelty is ingenious. Was there anything in that speech for her to be sorry for, and, if there were, would she be sorry?

"Some day," he said quietly, "I shall try to explain."

She regarded him again, this time with altered gaze.

"Some day," she said, "I hope you will tell me about that romantic career that Aunt Ethel was talking of."

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Was she sorry? Was she interested?

"It's not romantic," he protested. "It isn't in the least romantic. It's just a story of hard work and disappointment, and hard work and success."

"But Mr. Holt told us that in one month you were condemned to death for piracy in Central America and acted—what do they call it?—floor-manager for a firemen's ball in Denver."

"George has been dipping his brush in earthquake and eclipse. He never knew me till he met me in the West five or six years ago. I was condemned for piracy *in absentio* by a Spanish-American court because I had a job as cook on a filibustering ship that was wrecked off Yucatan and never got any nearer to shore, and I was floor-manager at the firemen's ball because—well, because I happened to belong to a fire-company."

"But you did have adventures in Alaska and Colorado and New Mexico?"

"Oh, I've knocked about a bit."

"And——" Her lips were parted, her eyes large. She no longer heard the voices on the stage. "Did you ever——Mr. Holt said you once shot——"

"Yes," said Stainton, gravely, "I think I once killed a man."

She clasped her hands on the railing of the box.

"Tell me about it," she commanded. Her tone was a compliment.

"There's nothing to tell. It was in an Alaskan mining-camp. The man was drunk and armed. He attacked me, and I had to defend myself. He shot twice before I shot at all, but I hit and he didn't. I'm sorry I had to do it to remain alive, but I'm not sorry to have remained alive."

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"Oh," she cried, petulantly, "you are *so* matter-of-fact!"

"Not nearly so matter-of-fact as you suppose. Not in the important things. In business, in everyday life, a man has to be matter-of-fact. It's the only method to get what you want."

"Do you really think so?" She appealed to him now as to a well of knowledge. Perhaps, he reflected, she had about her ordinarily few wells to which she was permitted so to appeal. "Then maybe that is why I don't get what I want."

"Surely you have all you want."

She shook her raven hair. "Not any of it."

"And you want?"

"Lots of things."

"For instance?"

She smiled, but was firm. "No, I sha'n't tell you."

"Not one?"

"Not now."

"Perhaps they are not always the sort of things that you ought to have."

"Yes, they are."

"All of them?"

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Her nod was positive: "All."

"But, whether you ought to have them or not, are you equally sure that they would be worth

possessing?"

"How can I know till I have had them?"

"Easily. There are two ways of learning the value of anything we want: one is to get it, the other to lose it."

"We're crabbed against the things we miss."

"Are we? I don't know. Even if we are, there's a good deal to be said in favour of the comfort that lies in the philosophy of sour grapes."

She did not wholly follow him, but she was clear on the chief point. "It doesn't make me feel any more contented," she said, "to believe that I wouldn't have been happy if I had got something that I wanted to get and didn't."

Stainton shook his head.

"Some time," he said, "that belief will be your greatest comfort."

Muriel looked away. She was revolving this problem in her youthful mind, and when she replied it was by the *argumentum ad hominem*, which is an excellent argument and generally *ab femina*.

"You have been successful," she began. "If you had not been, would it have made you more contented to believe that success wouldn't have brought you happiness?"

"I was thinking," said Stainton, "of something in the past, something that I didn't get, and something that was not a business matter." He spoke slowly. [Pg 32]

She understood.

"I'm sorry," she said, softly.

"No, no," he smiled. "In point of fact, whenever I failed in prospecting I did try to think that money would not have made me happy. But you may be right, for I always started prospecting again."

"And now?"

"Oh, now," said Stainton, with a concluding smile, "I am trying hard to resist the manifold temptations of good fortune."

As he spoke, the curtain was falling on the tragic termination of *Madama Butterfly*. The Newberrys and their guests rose as the curtain fell, and Stainton held her cloak for Muriel. Newberry was gasping his way into his own coat, and Holt was holding for Mrs. Newberry a gorgeous Japanese kimono absurdly reminiscent of the opera to which they had not listened; but Muriel's cloak was a simple and beautiful garment in Stainton's eyes, a grey garment lined with satin of the colour of old-fashioned roses. As she got into it—"Oh, it's quite easy," she said—his awkward hand was brushed by her cheek, and he bent his head, certain of being unobserved in that hurry to depart wherewith the average American opera-audience expresses its opinion of the average operatic performance, and inhaled the perfume of her hair. His hands shook. [Pg 33]

With Holt he saw their hosts to their motor.

"Aren't you coming home with us for supper?" asked Mrs. Newberry.

But Holt, who was abominably curious, wished to quiz Stainton, and Stainton, with the wisdom of his years, knew that enough had been done for an initial evening.

"No, thanks," Stainton allowed Holt to say; "we've just met after five years, you know, and we've got no end of things to talk about."

Ethel Newberry leaned forward and pressed Stainton's hand.

"You will look us up soon?" she politely enquired.

"Indeed, yes," said Stainton.

"Always glad to see you," said Newberry.

Muriel said nothing, but Stainton pressed warmly the little hand that she unreservedly offered.

"Good-night," said Stainton.

"Good-night," said Muriel.

No, thought Stainton, as he reluctantly turned away with Holt, in spite of her caustic reference to his age, she must be merely an impulsive, innocent girl. He was glad to come to this determination, glad, however, simply because it was what he concluded must be a final answer to a question that had already become annoying. [Pg 34]

## EN GARDE, MONSIEUR!

As the motor swerved away from them, making for the up-channel of Broadway, Holt seized Stainton's arm, and began to pilot him through the crowd.

"Now," said he, "will you *please* tell me what the——"

"No," said Stainton, "I won't. Not yet."

"But you promised——"

"I know that. Only wait until we get to a quieter place than this. You can scarcely expect me to call out such things for all New York to hear."

They freed themselves of the whirlpool around the opera-house and began to walk northward.

Stainton was looking about him with the eyes of a man that has been for years in prison and has but just returned to his native town. He was not a New Yorker by birth, and he had never known the city well, but he had always loved it and through all his western exile he had dreamed of this triumphal return. He soon seemed to have forgotten the puzzle that he had agreed to explain to his friend.

"It's the same," he said, his gaze darting about the scurrying street, pausing now and again to rest on this or that building new to him although already old to Broadway. "It's still the same, and yet it's new—all new.—What's that place, the one over there on the corner?"

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Holt grudgingly told him.

"Fresh?" asked Stainton.

"Five years old," said Holt.

"And that?—And that?"

Again Holt supplied the information thus requested.

"I think that New York is alive," said Stainton.

"Well, you never thought it was Philadelphia, did you?"

"I mean that the city itself is a living thing, a gigantic organism. You know they say a man changes, atom by atom, so that, every seven years, he is a fresh being, and yet remains the same being. I believe that is true of some cities and most of all of New York."

Holt slapped him on the back.

"Good old Jim!" said Holt.

The careless words turned Stainton to matters more personal.

"Confound it," he said, only half-good-naturedly, "I wish you wouldn't call me old. I'm not."

"Of course," said Holt, "not old. Did I say old? Why, you're younger than ever, and a grand slam younger than I'll ever be again."

Stainton regarded this man of thirty-odd with whom, for a short time, he had been once so fast a friend and whom New York had so speedily converted into a corpulent, smug, bald-headed dandy. It would, indeed, be a pity if Stainton at fifty were not younger than Holt at thirty-five. And yet Holt had referred to the prematurely withered Newberry as "Old Newberry" much as he had now spoken of the miner as "Old Stainton"!

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"Oh, you," said Stainton: "you have reached the age at which a man doesn't object to being called old."

The cheerful Holt snorted. "All right," he said. "Now we're just off the Lobster Coast. Let's look about for a harbour and a likely place to eat and hear the sad story of your life."

They found it, although it is always a difficult task for a New Yorker to decide which of a hundred anxious restaurants he will at any given time pay to poison him; and, while Stainton's eyes went wide with wonder at the place, Holt, amid the muddy mill-race of his customary talk where bobbed only an occasional chip of clean English, piloted the way into the selected eating and drinking place. It was one of those gilded khans, each more gilded than the last, which, in the neighbourhood of Broadway and Forty-Second Street, spring up like grass beside a country road, last about as long as the grass, and, once gone, are about as long remembered. Here, at a corner table, Holt, within a few minutes, was drinking rapid glasses of Irish whiskey and soda, while Stainton slowly sipped at a glass filled from a half-bottle of champagne.

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"Now, then," said Holt: "your story. For Heaven's sake have pity on a suffering fellow-creature!"

Stainton considered.

"Of course," he said, "this is confidential."

"Of course."

"I shouldn't tell it, George, if it weren't that I had betrayed part of it in a moment of excitement \_\_\_"

"Excitement? Well, I suppose that's what some call it."

"And so," pursued Stainton, "made such an ass of myself—"

"Now you're getting down to facts," Holt agreed.

"In the first place," said Stainton, "I repeat that I am not crazy."

"Then I am," said Holt with conviction.

"You are the best judge of that, George."

Holt smiled.

"Wait a bit," said Stainton. "I wouldn't be surprised, George, if you were a trifle mad; as for me, just make up your mind that J. G. Stainton is sane."

"That's what they all say," Holt interposed. "Bellevue's full of men that are sane. Still, anything to get on with your story: sane you are."

"No, you mustn't grant it that way. I want you to draw your conclusions from what I am going to tell you."

Holt groaned.

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"All right; all right," he said, "but for Heaven's sake *tell* it!"

Stainton settled himself in his chair. He lit a cigar.

"I have to begin," he said, "at the beginning. The average man's biography is the story of an internecine war, a war between his heart and his head, and the heart generally wins. What has won with me, you may, as I said, judge for yourself. My father was a doctor in one of those little towns that are scattered about Boston in the way that the smaller drops of ink are scattered about the big splash on a blotter. My mother died when I was born. The governor didn't have a big practice, but it was a steady one, and, if he was the sort that would never be rich, at least he promised to be the sort that would never starve. What he mostly wanted was to send me to Harvard, and then to make a surgeon of me."

"I knew you must have had a good coach in bandaging," said Holt.

Stainton disregarded this reference to the grizzly.

"I could never make out," he resumed, "why so many parents think they have a right to determine their children's tastes and trades. That tendency is one of our several modern forms of slavery. Most men seem to assume that Fate, by making them fathers through no will of their own, has played them a low trick, and that they are therefore right in revenging themselves on Fate by training their sons into being exactly the sort of men that they themselves have been, so that Fate will thus be forced, you see, to do the same thing all over again."

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"I don't see," said Holt. "But don't mind me."

"Very well. I am not condemning my father. He was without conscious malice, and he did his best, poor man. I dare say, after all, that he was like most of us: so thoroughly pleased with his own life that he couldn't imagine doing any better for the world than giving it another life of precisely the same kind. Anyhow, I never was intended by nature for a doctor, still less for a surgeon, as you will see. The truth is, I was afraid."

"Afraid? *You!*" Holt laughed at the idea. "I don't believe it," he said.

"I was. I was afraid of two things: old age and death. They were the twin horrors of my boyhood. They are still my twin horrors."

"Then, considering how you have run after death and sidestepped old age, it looks to me as if \_\_\_"

"Thank you, George; but, if you will only listen a little longer, I think you will understand. While I was still very small, my father—he drove about on his professional calls in a buggy: the old-fashioned way—was kicked in the head by his horse. He never really recovered, and yet, for a long time, he was not in a condition that peremptorily demanded treatment. What actually resulted was a disease rare enough, I dare say, but quite well known: he developed premature and rapid senility. It all happened, once it got under way, in six months. In that time I saw him—I, a mere boy—become, day by day, a doting idiot."

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"Young as I was, I called in, of my own initiative, a Boston specialist.

"'There is nothing to do, my boy,' he told me, 'except wait for the end. Meanwhile make your father as comfortable as you can. What you see going on in him is just what begins to go on in every human being from the moment of birth: Old Age. Here, of course, it is specialised and malignantly accelerated. It is senility; that is to say, it is, though here abnormally magnified, an essentially normal phenomenon. Old age, my boy; old age.'"

Stainton wet his lips with wine.

"I can see the specialist yet as he said it," he presently went on, "and I am not likely to forget what it made me feel. There must have been some neighbour about at the time, or the housekeeper, but it remains in my memory as an interview between him and me alone. I did the only thing to be done: I bore it. I hated to have my father sent to an institution—which shows that I was very young indeed,—and so I simply nursed him along, the housekeeper and I doing the best we could.

"It was ugly, and it got worse every day. We could see it get worse. It was—it was Hell. There are things, lots of them, about it that I just couldn't tell you. I lived in a fascinated terror, and all the time I kept saying to myself:

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"This is the same thing that's going on in everyone I see. It's going on in me. It's getting farther and farther along in me with every tick of my watch. It's what is crawling toward me out of the dark corners of the years to come."

Stainton stopped again, barely to sip his champagne.

"That," he said, "is how I came to be afraid of Old Age."

Holt shuffled his feet.

"A horse-kick isn't hereditary," he said.

"Wait," said Stainton. He put aside his extinguished cigar and resumed: "One by one I saw my father's powers fade. I could check them off as they went; powers we are all so used to that we don't know how dependent we are on them: niceties of the palate, differentiation between pleasant odours and unpleasant, delicacies of sight, distinctness of hearing, steadiness, the control of muscles that we are normally unconscious of controlling. These things go, slowly—very slowly—in each of us, and when they are gone, even when they are partly gone, when we never guess that they are gone, but when people about us detect our condition and comment on it, without our so much as dreaming of it—"

He stopped again, and again went on:

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"Then there's Death," he said, with an abrupt change. "Did you ever see anybody die, Holt?"

Holt shook his bald head. He did not like this sort of thing.

"No," he admitted.

"Not your parents?"

"No; my father died when I was away at school, and my mother during my first trip abroad."

"Well," continued Stainton, "it is not pretty. We hear a lot of talk about the dignity and serenity and nobility of death. Nothing to that. Absolutely nothing. Every doctor and nurse I've ever questioned agrees: it is always a horrible wrench accompanied by details that are disgusting. There are subsidiary manifestations.—There is no dignity in terror; there is no serenity in pain. My father—I was looking towards him through the garden window. The window was open. He had found a razor. A dull razor. He may have had some idea that he was shaving. He cut his throat from ear to ear. Jugular; carotid; pneumogastric nerve. I remember the queer gurgle and the—"

"Do you wonder that I came to be as much afraid of death as I was of old age? I lay awake nights, I tell you—nights and nights—interminable nights, thinking, shaking.

"It all ended only after years of fighting and one horrid failure. There was a girl—it was a good many years ago, and I had just graduated from Harvard. I fell in love with her. Her people wanted her to marry a cousin, but I think she really wanted to marry me. At any rate, one day, when we were skating together, the ice broke beneath her feet, and into the cold black water we both went.

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"It seemed to me that I was hours going down—down, and that I was still longer coming up. The old fears got me. I went through all the agonies of realisation. When my head rose above water I grabbed at the ice, and it cracked to little bits between my fingers. I felt myself sinking again, and just then she—the girl I was in love with—flung an arm toward me. I shoved her away.

"We were both rescued. There were lots of people about, the water wasn't very deep, and there had been only a small percentage of risk. It would have been, had I not known what death really meant, the chance of a lifetime for a rogue to play the hero. But, you see, I was too much afraid of death. I had flung her off to save my own skin, and she neither forgot nor forgave.

"She wouldn't, of course, have anything more to do with me. She threw me over, as she had every good reason to. I cleared out and went West. She married the cousin and eighteen years ago—so I heard long after her marriage—she died as my mother had died—in childbirth."

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Stainton slowly refilled his glass.

Holt shook from him the gloom of the earlier portion of Stainton's narrative. He became once more interested in the manner in which he was accustomed to be interested.

"You certainly cured yourself out West," he said.

"Of my twin horrors?" enquired Stainton. "I tried to. That is why people thought me brave, when they didn't think me rash. I took myself by the shoulders. I said to myself: 'There are two things that you must do. First, you must get over showing your fear of death. Next, you must live in such a way as to postpone old age to the farthest possible limit. In order to accomplish this postponement, in order to approach old age gently and in sound condition, you must make enough money to guarantee you a quiet, unworried life from the age of forty-five or fifty.'"

"Well," said Holt, "you've done it."

"You know what psychologists tell you about apparitions?" said Stainton.

"Not me. I don't go in for spooks."

"They say, George, that if you think you see a ghost and at once run away from it, you will be seeing ghosts forever after; but that if, at the first glimpse of your first ghost, you will only grip your nerves, walk up to him and touch him, you will find that he is only your yesterday's suit flung on a chair and forgotten, or a sheet flapping from a clothesline, or something else commonplace seen only in a different light, and that thereafter you will never again see a ghost."

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"Oh!" said Holt, "do they?"

"That principle," said Stainton, "I tried in regard to my fear of death. I couldn't do it with old age, but I could do it with death, and I did. I began by taking small risks. Then I took greater ones, and at last I would deliberately court destruction—or appear to. The outcome was that, by the time you came to know me, I could do the sort of things you admired me for."

"Without turning a hair," Holt added. "You'd got your nerve back. You'd become a brave man."

"No," defined Stainton, "I had become only a man that could conceal his cowardice. I am still, in my heart, as much afraid of death as I ever was."

"I don't believe you," said Holt, more warmly; "and I'll bet you did even better with the other scarecrow."

"Old age?" Stainton's clear eyes snapped. "I had to go at that in another way, but there at least I have succeeded. George, I have trained like a Spartan. I have lived like a monk——"

"Don't I know it, Jim? Remember that night I tried to lure you into the dance-hall at Durango?"

"I have kept hard and keen and clean," said Stainton. "I have got myself—you can guess by what denials and sacrifice and fights—into the shape where the fear of senility, of loss or depreciation of my powers, is reduced to the irreducible minimum." He spoke a little boastfully, but so earnestly that there was, in tone or words, no hint of the prig. "Tap that," he said.

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He expanded his wide chest. He offered his biceps to Holt's congratulatory fingers. He filled his glass to the brim and balanced it, at arm's length, on the palm of his hand without spilling a drop of the wine.

"I went this morning," he said joyously, "to the best doctor in this New York of yours. That fellow went over me with all the latest disease-detecting and age-detecting machinery known to science."

"Well?" asked Holt.

"He said that I was to all intents and purposes not a day over twenty-five."

Holt nodded approval.

"And you've kept your heart and mind as young as you've kept your body; that's a cinch," said he.

"Younger," declared Stainton. "I have had to fight there harder than anywhere else, but I have won. In spite of that first love disappointment, in spite of friends that have gone back on me now and then, in spite of rough work in rough places and among rough men, in spite of money lost and money won, I have kept on believing. I was saying to someone else this evening that there was comfort in the philosophy of the sour-grapes, but I didn't really mean it. At any rate, I never followed the sour-grape school. I have just believed. That is the whole secret of it, George; all that you have to do is to say to yourself; 'I don't care; I won't doubt. I *believe* in the world; I believe in Man.'"

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Holt smiled.

"Wait till you know New York," said he.

"I am doubt-proof," answered Stainton. "I am immune."

"And so——" urged Holt, dropping this phase of the subject and reverting to Preston Newberry's niece.

"And so," Stainton took him up, "I decided to marry, sell my mine as soon as a good offer comes and be easy. I came to New York. I went to-night to the opera." His voice grew unaffectedly softer. "And at the opera," he said, "I saw the girl that I had loved all those years ago; that dead girl come to life again; not a curve altered, not a tint faded; not a day older. I knew, in a flash,



that it must be my old sweetheart's daughter. And it was."

"What? Muriel Stannard?"

"Whose mother was Muriel Benson. Precisely."

Holt whistled softly.

"Well?" asked he.

"Well," said Stainton, "I intend to marry her."

For a moment Holt made no comment. Then he coughed and finally, as his dry cough produced no visible effect, he broke forth:

"But, Jim——"

There he stopped.

Stainton looked at him enquiringly.

"Yes?"

"But, Jim, you—you——Oh, what's the use!"

"Of course it sounds unusual, to you," admitted Stainton, "but to me it is all simple enough."

Holt took a deep pull at his glass.

"Oh, it's simple, all right," said he. "It's so simple it's artless."

Stainton's iron-grey brows drew together. "I don't understand."

"Of course it sounds unusual to you," admitted Holt. "If you did understand, you wouldn't do this thing. You don't understand; you can't, and that's just the pity of the whole business." Like all men of his stripe, he gathered both conviction and courage from the sound of his own voice. "You've lived in the desert and such places like a what-do-y'-call-it—anchorite—and had opium-dreams without the fun of a smoke."

Stainton stiffened.

"I didn't ask your advice," said he.

"You wanted it," Holt ventured.

"I don't mind your giving it if it amuses you," said Stainton, shrugging his shoulders; "but I am quite clear on one point: you are what most city-bred men are: you have looked so hard after happiness that, when you see it, you can't enjoy it."

"Am I?" The liquor was burning in Holt's eyes. "Perhaps I am, but that rule works two ways. Some fellows don't look hard enough. I don't know, but I imagine if a man never uses his eyes he goes blind."

Stainton, who had carried a few of his books to the West with him, wanted to quote Cicero: "*Sis a veneris amoribus aversus; quibus si te dedideris, non aliud quidquam possis cogitare quam illud quod diligis.*" All that he said, however, was:

"I have tried to live in such a way that I may be fit to look a good woman in the face."

"What man alive is fit to do that?" Holt answered.

Stainton did not directly reply, and Holt, somewhat put out by the merely silent opposition, found himself a little at a loss.

"You don't want to tie up with a kid," he nevertheless endeavoured to proceed. "That's what it really amounts to. What you want is a woman, a ripe one. If you're going to live in the swim, you need somebody that can teach you the stroke. You want somebody with the *entrée*, somebody that can run your house in the Avenue or the Drive and isn't afraid of a man in livery."

"Put my servants in livery?" Stainton was indulgent, but he added: "To make clowns of your fellow men—really I think that's a sin against God."

"All right," said Holt; "but you're in love with an idea. Not even a girl, mind you: an idea. Well, you mark my words: it's a cinch that two people who haven't anything to do but tell each other how much they love each other are bound, soon enough, to exhaust the subject and begin to want something else to talk about."

"Now it is you who don't understand." Stainton did not know why he should argue with this city waster, unless it was because he had for so long had no chance to speak of these things to anyone. But he went on: "There ought to be love in every marriage, but marriage wasn't ordained for love only."

"Lucky for it," said Holt, "for if it were it would be a worse swindle than it is now, and that's going some. What *was* it ordained for? Babies?"

"Yes."

"What? There are fifty of 'em born outside of marriage right here in New York every day in the year. When Romeo makes eyes at Juliet, he isn't thinking babies."

"He only doesn't know that he is, that's all."

"Suppose you're right," said Holt; "that's all the more reason why a fellow should want to beget a baby instead of marrying one. Look here, Jim: I'm not butting in on your affairs because I like to; but I know what I'm talking about when I say you can't play this lead without spoiling the game."

"Do you mean," asked Stainton, "that Miss Stannard's guardians will object?"

"Hardly. Her guardians are the Newberrys."

"Then what do you mean?"

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Holt interpreted.

"I mean," he said, "that you won't be happy with a child for a wife, and that a child won't be happy with you for a husband."

Stainton started to rise from the table. Then he seemed to think better, seemed to recall his old and brief, but firm, friendship with the Holt of Holt's western days, and sat back in his chair.

"Jim," continued Holt, "you're actually in earnest about all this marrying-talk, aren't you?"

"So much so," replied Stainton, frowning, "that I don't care to have you refer to it in that way."

"Oh, all right. I beg pardon. I didn't intend to make you sore. Only it won't do, you know. Really."

"Why not?"

"I've just been telling you why not. Difference in ages. Too great."

Stainton's face became graver. He leaned forward toward Holt, pushed his glass aside and, with his heavy forefinger, tapped for emphasis upon the board.

"I told you," he said, "that your best New York doctor has pronounced me to all intents and purposes only twenty-five years old."

"O, Hell!" said Holt.

Stainton's brows drew close together.

"I mean what I say," he declared.

"Of course you do. But did the doctor-fellow mean what *he* said?"

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"Why shouldn't he? I paid him to tell the truth. He probably thought I suspected some illness, so that, from his point of view, there would have seemed more money in it for him if he had said I needed treatment—his treatment."

"Perhaps. But medicine isn't an exact science yet—not by several thousand graveyards full."

"What of that? I didn't need the doctor's assurances—really. I have my own feelings to go by."

"Yes, I know. I've heard all that before. Many a time. A woman's as old as she looks, but a man's as young as he feels—*per haps*."

"A man is as old as his arteries—and a few other units of his physical economy."

"And a girl," said Holt, significantly, "is no older than the—what is it?—units of *her* physical economy."

Stainton bit his under lip.

"A girl is mature at eighteen—mature enough. I won't talk of that, George. We are discussing my age, and I tell you that I have something better than even the specialist's word to stand on: I have the knowledge of my own careful, healthy, abstemious life. I am sounder in body than hundreds and hundreds of what you would call average New Yorkers of twenty-one. I am sounder than their average. More than that, I have done something that most of them have not done: I have kept fresh and unimpaired the tastes, the appetites, the spirit of that age."

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"You mean you believe you have."

"I know it."

"How can you know it until you try? And you won't try till you've committed yourself, Jim."

Stainton shook his great head.

"At this moment," he said, "I'm in twice better health—mental, moral, physical and every other way—understand me: *every other way*—than you were ten years ago."

"Certainly," Holt cheerfully admitted, "I'm past salvation; everybody knows that; but you—"

"I have never been a waster."

"That's just it. It'd be better for you if you had."

"You don't mean that."

"In this mix-up, yes I do. Not much, you know. Just a little picnic now and then."

"Modern medicine has knocked that theory into a cocked hat."

"Has it, Jim? All right. But a man that's been a long time in a close room can stand the close room a bit longer than a fellow that's just come in from the open air. You've formed habits. Fine habits, I grant you that, but you've formed 'em; they're fixed, just as fixed as my bad ones are. You've come to depend on 'em, even if you don't know it. Your brain is used to 'em. So's your body—only more so. Well, what's going to happen when you change 'em all of a sudden—habits of a lifetime, mind you? That's what I want to know: what's going to happen?"

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"You talk," said Stainton, "as if every man that married, married under the age of forty-five."

"I talk," Holt retorted, "as if no man of fifty married for his own good a girl of eighteen."

Stainton's fist clenched. His face flushed crimson. His steel-grey eyes narrowed. He raised a tight hand. Then, with the fist in mid-air, his mood changed. He mastered himself. The fist opened. The hand descended gently. Stainton chuckled.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said. "I forgive you because I know you are speaking only out of your friendship for me." He hesitated. "That is, unless—" He frowned again, but only slightly—"unless you yourself," he interrogatively concluded, "happen to feel toward Miss Stannard as I do?"

Holt relieved him there. It was his turn to laugh, and he laughed heartily.

"O, Lord, no!" said he. "Make yourself easy about that, old man. I've got just enough to live on comfortably by myself without exercising too much economy, and if I ever marry it will have to be a woman that can give me the luxuries I can't get otherwise."

"Then," smiled Stainton, "I hope you will soon need many luxuries and will soon find a good woman to supply them. I thank you for your interest, George," he went on; "but you have been arguing about me, and, in spite of our ages, you are old and I am young. I am young, I tell you, and even if I were not, I could see nothing wrong in a marriage between a man of my years and a girl of Miss Stannard's."

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"Between fifty and eighteen?"

"Between fifty and eighteen. Exactly. It happens every day."

"It does. But do you think because it's plenty, it's right? Do you think that whatever happens often, happens for the best?"

"I do not think; I know. I know that a girl of eighteen is better off with a man steady enough to protect and guide her than she is with an irresponsible boy of her own years."

"How about the irresponsible girl? Why should the boy be more irresponsible than the girl?"

"The girl will have a mature man to protect and guide her."

"A man of twenty-five? Or a man of fifty? Protect and guide!" echoed Holt. "Is *that* marriage?"

"An important part of it."

"Pff!" George sniffed. "You must think that guiding and protecting is an easy business."

"I think," said Stainton, good-humouredly, "that you are a good deal of a fool."

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"So you've got it all arranged in your own mind?" Holt, who had ordered his sixth whiskey-and-soda, poured it down his throat. The fifth was already thickening his speech.

"All," said Stainton.

"I see. You've counted on everything but God. Don't you think you'd better reckon a little on God, Jim?"

Stainton bore with him. After all, Holt had now reached that stage of drunkenness at which most drinkers invite the Deity to a part in their libations.

"What I do," Stainton said, "I do without blaming God for my success or failure. I am not one of those persons who, when anything unusually unpleasant comes to them, refer to it as 'God's will.'"

Holt hiccoughed. Religion had never bothered him and so he, in his sober moments, religiously refrained from bothering religion. His cups, however, were sometimes theological.

"Still, He's there, you know," said Holt.

"Your God?" asked Stainton. "Why, your god is only your own prejudices made infinite."

"You know what I mean," Holt laboriously explained. "In the really 'portant things of life, what's fellow do, and what makes him do it?"

"Reason," suggested Stainton.

"The really 'portant things generally come too quick for—for—lemme see: for reason."

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"Philosophy?"

"To quick for that, too."

"Instinct, perhaps."

"Nd don't say 'n instinct. Fellow's 'n instincts are low, but he does something—high. Sort of surroundings 's been brought up in—partly. Not altogether. Partly's something else; something from—from—" Holt groped for the word. "From outside," he concluded triumphantly and waved an explanatory hand. "Well," he added, "that's God."

Stainton rose.

"Yes, yes," he replied. "I dare say. But it's getting late, and I'm an early riser." He beckoned to a waiter for his bill.

"What's hurry?" enquired Holt.

"It is late," repeated Stainton.

Holt shook his head.

"Never late in New York," said he, and then rising uncertainly to his feet, he pointed a warning finger. "Or you may call it Nature. Perhaps's Nature's a better word. Nature. Beautiful nature. Trees and things. Birds mating in—in May. Mustn't go 'gainst beautiful nature, Jim."

"Come on," said Stainton.

But in the street, Holt flung his arms about his unwilling companion's neck.

"I'm—I'm fond of you, Jim," he said. "You save' my life 'n'—an' God knows I love you." Easy tears were running down his puffed cheeks. "Only you *are* old, Jim. You know you are."

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Stainton disguised his disgust. He disengaged himself gently.

"No, I'm young, George," he said, "and young blood will have its way, you know."

Holt faced him, swaying on the curb.

"So you really mean—mean to do—to do——? You know what I mean?"

"If she will have me, I do," said Stainton, for the third time that night: "I intend to marry her."

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## IV

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### THE APPLE OF THEIR EYE

Mrs. Preston Newberry had risen to the distinction of that name several months before Stainton, as a young Harvard undergraduate, came to know and love her sister. Very likely she had never heard of Jim until his triumphal march to New York, and certainly, if she had ever heard of him, she had long ago forgotten his name. Her early married life had completely occupied itself in an endeavour to live up to her new title, and, since this effort was not crowned with a success so secure as to dispense with the necessity of careful watching (for eternal vigilance is the price of more things than liberty), her present existence was sufficiently employed to make her regard the care of her niece with resignation rather than with joy.

Muriel's father had not survived his wife beyond a decade. In that period he managed to spend all the money that the previous portion of his mature career had been devoted to acquiring, and Muriel's grandparents on both sides had long since passed to the sphere of celestial compensations; the girl had, therefore, in some measure, been forced upon her aunt. A timid little girl with long dark hair that nearly concealed her face, she was brought to New York.

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"And now," Mrs. Newberry had remarked to her husband, "the question is: what are we to do with her?"

It may be that she had entertained from her early reading of the novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward a vague hope that Preston would propose to make Muriel the child-light of their otherwise now definitely childless home. If, however, such an expectation had formed, it was speedily shattered: Preston, like many another husband, inclined to the opinion that one member of his wife's family was enough in his house. He expressed this opinion in his usual manner: briefly, but not directly.

"How the hell do I know?" he asked.

When Ethel—Ethel was really the stout Mrs. Newberry's Christian name—when Ethel had evinced a disposition to discuss in further detail the question of Muriel's future, Newberry had done what he usually did when Ethel began any discussion: he recalled an engagement at one of

the three of New York's most difficult clubs.

It was a procedure that seldom failed. He disliked deciding anything, even where his own pleasures were involved; and so, he was accustomed to presenting the problem to his wife much as he presented her with an allowance, recalling an engagement at one of the clubs, going out and not returning until he was sure that Ethel had gone to bed "to sleep on it." In this way, even when the subject proved a hard mattress, Preston's couch remained downy, and Ethel would meet him, over the breakfast eggcups, with the riddle solved.

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In the instance of the disposal of Muriel, the matter proceeded as always. Mrs. Newberry came downstairs next morning in her newest and pinkest kimono, an embroidered importation from Japan, whose wing-like sleeves showed plumper arms and wrists than such a garment is made to display. Though her eyes were red, she smiled.

"You won't mind paying the child's school bills?" she quavered.

"Not if the school's far enough away," said Preston.

"I had thought——" began his wife.

"Because," said Preston, "it would be wrong to the girl to bring her up at one of these New York finishing-schools. They inculcate extravagant ideals; they're full of a lot of the little children of the rich, and Muriel might acquire there a notion that she was to inherit some of my money—which she isn't."

Ethel Newberry considered this hint final. She dropped at once to the last of the dozen institutions of instruction that she had made into a mental list, and Muriel was sent to a convent school.

"Though we are not Catholics," said Mrs. Newberry.

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"Excellent discipline," said Preston. "Is it far away?"

"Nearly in Philadelphia."

"Oh, well, at holiday time——"

"She can"—Ethel brightened—"she can come——"

"Yes, she can have you come to see her," said Preston.

Muriel passed eight years at this school. So long as Mrs. Newberry's conscience was able to conquer her desires, the young pupil's aunt would run over to Philadelphia for the short vacations; the long ones were, as often as could be arranged, spent by Muriel, by invitation, at the home of one or another of her classmates. Now, however, the girl had graduated and had remained as a post-graduate as long as the curriculum permitted.

"She'll have to come out," said Mrs. Newberry.

"Of the school," asked Preston, "or into society?"

"Both. The one entails the other."

"What's the hurry?"

"Good heavens, Preston; if she stays there much longer she'll become a nun!"

"Suppose she does?" asked Newberry, who was a Presbyterian. "I'm surprised to hear you refer to a pious life as if it were a smash-up."

Nevertheless, in the end, he agreed that Muriel should pass the present winter under his hospitable roof ("Though, further than that," he mentally vowed, "I'll be damned if I endure"). So, Muriel had, without too much effort on her guardians' part, been taken about with them on numerous occasions lately, most recently to the Metropolitan, where Stainton had met her.

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It was on the morning after this meeting that, with commendable promptness, but at a deplorably early hour—to be exact, at eleven o'clock—Stainton called at the Newberrys'. His card was presented to Mrs. Newberry through the crack of the door while that good lady was in her bath.

Ethel, who was big, blonde, and bovine, struggled into the nearest dressing-gown and hurried to the breakfast-room, where her husband, over a newspaper, was engaged in his matutinal occupation of scolding the coffee. Her face a tragic mask, Mrs. Newberry placed the offending pasteboard by Preston's plate.

"Preston," said she. "Look at that. *Look* at it!"

Newberry appeared shorter and thinner than ever as he sat crumpled over the newspaper, his grey moustache short and thin and his head covered by grey hair, short and thin and worn in a bang. He obeyed his wife's request. He expressed no surprise.

"Looks like somebody's card," he said.

"It is, Preston," wailed his wife. "It is that awful western person's that George Holt would drag to our box—*our* box—last night."

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"My dear," said Newberry, "Mr.—er—what's his name?—oh, ah: Stainton;—yes—Mr. Stainton appears to be a man of means. Concerning the rich nothing except good."

"But his card, Preston; his card!"

"What's the matter with his card?"

"He has sent it up—here—at this time of day!"

"Hum. Western eccentricity, I suppose. He'll get over all that sort of thing in time."

Ethel was hopping heavily from one slippared foot to the other.

"He hasn't merely left it," she distractedly explained. "He's here—he's actually in the house."

"Well, he's not a burglar, Ethel."

"Don't talk so, Preston. I know he's not a burglar. But what does he want here at this hour?"

"I suppose he wants to see you."

"Now? *What* can he want to see *me* about at 11 A.M.?"

"If you really want to know, my dear, I think that the best way to satisfy your curiosity is to go down and ask him."

"How can I?" She spread wide her arms, the more clearly to bring to her husband's wandering attention the fact that she was not yet by any means dressed to receive callers. "Won't you go?" she pleaded.

"Why should I?" asked Newberry. "*I'm* not in the least curious—This coffee is worse every morning. You really must have Mrs. Dawson discharge Jane." [Pg 65]

Ethel uttered a mighty sob and fled. She sent word to Stainton that she would be down in five minutes to greet him. After half an hour, she entered the reception room. Not ten minutes later, she rushed again upon her husband, this time in the smoking room, that she called his "study."

"What on earth do you suppose he wants?" she cried.

Preston, with a face like a martyred saint's, put down his newspaper. He did not, however, take his cigarette from his mouth to reply.

"What who wants?"

Ethel wrung her hands.

"That awful man!" she said.

"Is it possible that you are referring to my friend, Mr.—er—Mr. Stainton?"

"Of course I am, Preston."

"Oh! He's still here?"

"Why, yes. I've only just seen him."

"You made him wait rather long, my dear. I hope you are not keeping him waiting again."

"What else could I do?"

"How do I know?"

"Preston, do try to show a little interest. I say: what on earth do you suppose he wants?"

"If he was as bored by that performance at the Metropolitan as I was," said Newberry, yawning, "he wants a drink. Don't *you* know what he wants?" [Pg 66]

"He wants—he wants," Ethel dramatically brought it out, "to take Muriel for a ride in his motor."

Preston had been seated in an arm-chair without the slightest indication of disturbing himself either for his wife or the visitor. At this announcement by Mrs. Newberry he rose with what, for him, was alacrity.

"I'll call her myself," he said.

"But, Preston! Think of it!"

"That is just what I am doing, my dear—and I think confoundedly well of it, let me tell you."

"In his motor!" Mrs. Newberry repeated the phrase as if it were pregnant with evil.

"What's the matter with his motor?" snapped Preston. "It's a motor, you say, not a monoplane. Mr.—Mr. Stainton has money enough to buy a safe motor—as motors go."

"Oh, Preston, consider: Muriel—alone—morning! The child isn't even really out yet!"

At this, Newberry fronted his wife squarely. For perhaps the first time in his life, he suffered the pains of definite assertion.

"Now, understand, Ethel," he said, "let's cut out all this rot about Muriel. The girl is *not* such a child and she is out: she's out of school, and that's all the outing she's going to get. In fact, it's high time she was in again."

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"She can't go back to the convent, Preston."

"Mr. Stainton doesn't want to motor her back to the convent. No. But if we manage things with half a hand, she needn't be much longer at large. Now, don't keep my friend Mr. Stansfield waiting any longer. I surmise that he has his machine with him?"

"He came in it. It's at the door. I couldn't see the make."

"No. Naturally. Well, his bringing it along shows him to be a man of expedition. It's what we might expect of a successful miner. And it is promising for other reasons, too. Get Muriel, take her down, hand her over to him with your blessing—but be sure you hand her over as your dearest treasure—and then come back here to me."

Saying this, Preston resumed the perusal of his newspaper.

Ethel left the room. When she returned, she had the air of seeing blood upon her hands.

"Well?" asked Preston.

"They're gone."

Preston folded the paper and laid it carefully upon the table that stood beside him. The mood of assertion still tore at his vitals.

"Now then," he began, "about this Mr. Stansfield——"

"Stainton," mildly corrected his wife as she took a seat opposite him and looked out over the now rapidly filling Madison Avenue.

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"Stainton." Newberry accepted the amendment. "What's wrong with him?"

"Oh," said Ethel, her fingers twisting in her lap, "it's not that. There's nothing *wrong* with him."

"Well, then!" Preston spoke as if his wife's admission settled the matter.

But it did not settle the matter.

"Only he is not——" Ethel added: "Is he quite a gentleman?"

Newberry sighed as one sighs at a child that will not comprehend the simplest statement.

"It's hard for art to compete with Nature," said he; "a gentleman is man-made, but Nature can do better when she wants."

"We don't really know him."

"I know a good deal about him, Ethel. Enough for present purposes."

"From Mr. Holt?"

"Yes. When Holt read of his success in the papers, the canny George went to his brokers and made inquiries—thorough inquiries."

"He seems to have got whatever money he has very quickly, Preston."

"That only proves that he is either lucky or crooked. It doesn't prove he didn't get it. What makes you think he's not quite a gentleman?"

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"Well," said Ethel, "——that."

"Poof!" said Newberry. "He was talking a good deal to Muriel at the opera last night. Didn't he behave all right?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. I asked her what he talked about, and she said she didn't know."

"Very sensible of her, I'm sure. I wouldn't have expected it of her. It goes to show that she's not too young to marry."

Ethel permitted herself a fat start.

"O, Preston, you never mean——"

"Now, my dear, you know very well that we've meant nothing else. You've known it ever since I sent you to call Muriel."

"And you don't think him too old for her?"

"Old? He's probably not fifty."

"Mr. Holt said he thought fifty."

"Very well: fifty. Fifty and eighteen. The one has the youth and the other supplies the balance. Most suitable. Besides, it's done every day. Heavens, Ethel, you mustn't expect everything!"

"But do you think there's nobody else, Preston? She has been away a good deal, you know, and \_\_\_"

"Somebody else?"

"Yes." Ethel's eyes sought her husband's and, meeting them, fell. "Somebody that the child cares for," she murmured.

"Stuff!" said Preston. "That convent-place has a high reputation for the way it's conducted. Also, any man of forty can steal a girl from any boy of twenty if he only cares to try. The only trouble is that he hardly ever cares enough about it to try." [Pg 70]

"Fifty," repeated Mrs. Newberry.

"Fifty,—granted," continued Preston. "Where we're lucky is that this fellow seems to want to try—supposing there is any other chap, and of course there isn't."

"Do you think, Preston"—Ethel's eyes were downcast—"that she can learn to love him?"

"Ethel!" said Preston.

"But, dear," Ethel insisted, "it does seem a little as if this were the sort of thing that a girl ought to be left to decide for herself."

Newberry had risen and gone to the mantelpiece to seek a fresh cigarette. His wife's words brought him to a stop. He folded his thin arms across his chest.

"Look here," he said; "we have got to face this thing right now, and once and for all. What are the facts in the case? The facts are these: Here's Muriel with a pretty face and a good, sound, sensible education of the proper homely sort, which includes a healthy ignorance of this wicked world. And here's this fellow Stainsfield, or Stainborough, or whatever his name is, and I'm sure it makes no difference, a strong, fatherly kind of old dodo, comes to New York, 'b'gosh,' with his eyes bugging out at the first good-looker they light on. Well, he's not the Steel Trust, or a Transatlantic steamship combination, but he's what, until our palates were spoiled twenty years or so ago, we'd have called a confoundedly rich man. Understand? Then add to it that Muriel hasn't a cent of her own and no prospects—*no prospects*, mind you. And now see whether you'd not better forget to talk sentiment and begin to get busy. If you and Muriel don't get busy, it's a hundred-to-one shot some other girl will—and'll get him damned quick. Then Muriel will probably be left to get a job as school-teacher or something-or-other nearly as bad. He's worth a half-million if he's worth a cent." [Pg 71]

Ethel Newberry's large, innocent eyes opened wide. If surprise can be placid, they were placidly surprised.

"Are you quite sure about the money, dear?" she asked.

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## V

### ONE ROAD TO LOVE

Among the little company of persons aware of Jim Stainton's sentimental inclinations, or so far as were concerned the people most intimately affected by those inclinations, there appeared, thus far, to be a singular unanimity of opinion regarding the matter. Stainton, it is to be supposed, approved because the inclinations concurred with his pet theories. Newberry, although he did not know anything about Stainton's pet theories and would in all probability have jeered at them had he been enlightened, proved ready to welcome the miner because he had decided that the miner should relieve the Newberry household of a quiet presence that, its quiescence to the contrary notwithstanding, distinctly disturbed the even course of Newberry's existence. Ethel, as may be readily believed, found, under her husband's expert guidance, no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that, as she put it, "a match of this sort would be for the child's best interests."

To be sure, there was George Holt, if one counted him and his verdict. Still, even in this singularly imperfect world, where we believe in majorities and where they misgovern us, we acknowledge the purging benefits of an ever-present party in opposition; and the party in opposition to James Stainton was now composed of Mr. George Vanvechten Holt. He was a splendid minority of one, but he was not one of those most intimately affected, and he was not generally the sort of individual noticed. Stainton had saved his life, yet even Holt admitted that the life was scarcely worth the saving. [Pg 72]

"Not that I care anything about the youngster for her own sake," he would say, night after night, at his club, where he had made all the club-members he knew an exception to his promise of secrecy; "it's not that, and it isn't that my liking for Stainton shuts my eyes to his faults. Not a little bit. Tying up little Muriel to a man half a hundred years old is like sending virgins to that Minotaur-chap and all that sort of thing. And hitching good old Jim to a girl of eighteen is like fastening a scared bulldog to the tail of some new-fangled and unexploded naval-rocket: you don't know what's inside of it and you don't know where it's going to land; all you do know is that it's



going to be mighty mystifying to the dog. Still, as I say, I'm not personal. What makes me sore is the principle of the thing. It's so rottenly unprincipled, you know."

Holt, however, always ended by declaring that he would not attempt to interfere. He intimated, darkly, that he could, if he would, interfere with considerable effect, but he was specific, if darker, in his reasons therefor, in his decision not to attempt to save his threatened friends or fight for his outraged principles. [Pg 74]

The truth was that George had made one more endeavour after the evening of the opera. He was severely rebuffed. Because, as he never tired of stating, he really liked Stainton and would not forget that the miner had saved his life, he recurred, after much painful plucking-up of courage, to the amatory subject, which only intoxication had permitted him so boldly to pursue on the night previous.

He was seated in Stainton's sitting-room high in the hotel. It was late afternoon; the rumble and clatter of the city rose from the distant street, and Stainton, full of fresh memories of his motor drive with Muriel, was walking backward and forward from his bedroom, slowly getting into evening clothes.

"I sure never would have thought you were morbid," said Holt, from his seat on the edge of a table, whence he dangled his legs.

"Morbid?" repeated Stainton. "I am not."

"I mean—you know: about death and old age and all that sort of thing."

"I thought I had explained all that last night."

"It must have been over when I was with you in the West."

"It wasn't."

"Not when you were the first man to volunteer to go down in the shaft of 'Better Days' mine after the explosion?" [Pg 75]

"I have rarely been more afraid than I was then."

"Or when you played head-nurse in the spotted-fever mess at Sunnyside?"

"I was nearly sick—scared sick—myself."

Holt's patent-leather boots flashed in and out of the shadow cast by the table-edge.

"Hum," he said. "It don't seem to show a healthy state of mind, does it?"

Stainton had disappeared into his bedroom. From there his answer came, partly muffled by the half-closed door.

"I don't care to talk any more about it. I made my explanation to you last night, because I had promised to make one. That's all."

"I'm afraid I was a bit illuminated last night," said Holt.

"You were."

"Still, you know, I knew what I was saying."

Stainton did not reply.

"And what I said," Holt supplemented, "is what I think now and what I always will think."

"Very well. Let it go at that, George."

Holt made a mighty effort.

"The plain truth is," said he, "that people will call you an old fool to buy a piece of undressed kid."

Stainton's bulky figure filled the doorway. He was in his shirt-sleeves, his hands busy with the collar-button at the back of his neck. [Pg 76]

"That will do," he said.

"I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings——" said Holt.

"Then keep quiet."

"But you ought to know what people will say. Someone's got to tell you."

"I don't care what people will say."

"They'll say——"

Stainton advanced. His hands were now at his side, idle, but his face was completely calm.

"Never mind," he said.

"They'll say," concluded Holt, "that you're buying the little girl, and that you've been cheated in

the transaction——"

Stainton's hands were raised. They descended heavily upon Holt's shoulders. They plucked Holt from his perch and shook him until his teeth chattered. Then they dropped him, rather gently, into a chair.

"Now," said Stainton. His face was firm, and there was a cold blue flame playing from under his brows, but he was not even breathing hard. "Now, let this end it. If you want to be my friend, let this end your comments on my personal affairs. If you do not want to be my friend, go on talking as you have been, and I will throw you out of the window."

This incident partially accounts for Holt's resolute refusal thereafter to advise Stainton. Advise him further George certainly did not, although among his club-fellows he expressed himself as extremely anxious to have it remembered that, should anything go wrong with Stainton, George Holt had predicted as much. [Pg 77]

There remained, however, one person of importance to Stainton's project that still remained unconsulted and might have some opinion of more or less weight in regard to it. This was Muriel Stannard.

What she thought, or what she would ultimately come to feel about his plan, did occupy space in Stainton's cogitations. Notwithstanding his romanticism, Stainton was not so blind to fact as to fail to see that the girl's mind was as virgin as her body. Indeed, her brain, so far as her education might be said to have developed that organ, was less advanced than the rest of her physique, and this not because she was not intelligent, for now that she was in the world at last he could see her daily hastening toward mental maturity, but because her pastors and masters had brought her up in the manner supposed to be correct for girls of her position. Critics of that manner might say that its directors proceed on the theory that, since life is full of serpents, the best way to train children for life is not to teach them to distinguish between harmless and venomous reptiles, but to keep them in such ignorance of the snakes that they will be sure not to know one when they see it. Yet Stainton, anything rather than a critic of the established order, found himself not displeased with this manifestation—or lack of it. He wanted youth; he wanted his long lost, long postponed romance, and chance had put both these things within his reach in the person of this dusky-eyed girl. Physically she was what her mother had been, mentally she could be trained to complete resemblance. He would make of her what he conceived to be the best. And so he loved her. [Pg 78]

To ascertain her opinion, to predetermine it, Stainton was now elaborately preparing. Beginning with that introductory motor ride, in which Stainton's cautious manipulation of the automobile seemed to Muriel's unspoiled delight a union of skill and daring, he went about his courtship in what he believed a frank and regular way; in a way that both Preston and Ethel Newberry considered absolutely committal; in a way that, consider it as she might, Muriel accepted with every evidence of girlish pleasure.

There were more motor drives, with the aunt now playing chaperon: a chaperon that conscientiously chaperoned as little as possible. There were small theatre parties, small suppers, small dinners. One or two mothers of daughters, who dared to be civil to Stainton, were shooed away, attacked by Ethel with all the brazen loyalty of a ponderous hen defending her chicks from the assault of a terrier. The Newberrys, as in duty bound, retaliated upon Stainton's theatres, dinners, and suppers with two teas and a luncheon. Stainton "came back at them," as George Holt phrased it, with more suppers, theatres, and dinners, the dramas always carefully selected to suit the immature condition of Muriel's soul; and so the whole courtship progressed along those conventional lines which lay the road to the altar over a plain of rich foods irrigated by vintage wines. [Pg 79]

"Do you like this sort of thing?" Stainton heard himself asking the girl during one of the morning walks that he was permitted to take with her, unescorted, through Central Park.

"What sort of thing?" asked Muriel. "A day like this? I love it!"

It was a day worthy of being loved: one of those crisp autumnal days when New York is at its best and when the air, from the earth to the clear blue zenith, has a crystal clarity and a bracing tang that none other of the world's great cities possesses. Stainton felt as he used on some Rocky Mountain peak with the crests of lower eminences rolling away to the horizon like the waves of an inland sea below him; and Muriel, her cheeks glowing, walked by his side more like some firm-breasted nymph of those forests than a child of modern days and metropolitan civilisation.

"Yes," said Stainton, "this is splendid. But I meant the whole thing: New York, the life here, the city." [Pg 80]

"I love that, too," said Muriel.

To Stainton's ear the use of one's first Latin verb translated was not merely schoolgirl carelessness and want of variety of phrase; it was an accurate expression of her abounding capacity for intense affection, her splendid fortune of emotion and her equally splendid generosity in its disposal.

"So do I," he said. "You can't begin to know how much it means to me to get back here."

"From the West?" Her eyes were soft at this. "But the West must be so romantic."

"Scarcely that. It has its points, but romance is not one of them."

"Oh, but your life there was romantic." She nodded wisely. "I know," she said.

Stainton's smile was tenderly indulgent.

"How did you get that idea?" he asked.

"Auntie Ethel has told me some of the brave things you did, and so has Uncle Preston."

"They have been reading some of the silly stories that the papers published when I made my big find. You mustn't believe all that the newspapers say."

"I believe these things," affirmed Muriel. "Wasn't that true about the time you rescued the man from the lynchers at Grand Junction?"

"Grand Joining. I didn't read it," said Stainton.

"But did you do it?"

"Oh, there was something of the sort." He honestly disliked to have his supposedly heroic exploits praised, only from modesty perhaps, perhaps from a super-sensitive consciousness that they were the results rather of fear than of bravery. "Look at that sky. Isn't it glorious?"

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"Then about the express robbery on the Rio Grande," said Muriel; "they said you went after the robbers when the sheriff and his men were afraid to go, and you captured them by yourself—three of them."

Stainton laughed, his broad, white teeth showing.

"The sheriff and his men," he said, "were along with me. It was not half so exciting as that play last night. Didn't you like the play?"

"I loved it. But, Mr. Stainton——"

"Yes?"

"Won't you tell me about some of these things?"

"I am sure they are much more interesting in the form in which the newspapers presented them."

"I always wanted to see a mine. Surely a mine must be lovely. Please tell me about a mine."

He tried to tell her, but mining had been to him only a means to an end and, the end now being attained, mining struck him as a dull subject. He abruptly concluded by telling her so.

"Besides," he said, "it is merely a business: a mere business, like any other. What can girls and women care for business?"

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So he brought back the conversation to the play that they had seen the night before. He discussed the plot with her, the plot having no relation to business, or to anything else approaching actuality for that matter, his iron-grey eyes all the while eagerly feeding on her beauty and her youth.

"You think," he asked, "that the Duchess should not have tried to break off the match?"

"Just because Arthur was young and poor?" inquired Muriel. "Of course I think she shouldn't. He was far too nice for her daughter anyway."

"But there was the suspicion that he had cheated at cards. Lord Eustace had told her so."

"She didn't really believe that; she only wanted to believe it. I think she was horrid."

"And her daughter, Lady—Lady——" He hesitated for the name.

"Lady Gladys," supplied Muriel. "I think she was horrid, too. To give up Arthur like that!"

Stainton smiled gravely.

"You would not have done it, Miss Stannard?"

"Indeed I would not!"

"What *would* you have done?"

Muriel's chin became resolute.

"I should have gone right up to him before them all there in the drawing-room, and I should have put my——" She broke off, rosy with embarrassment. "You will think I am awfully silly," she said.

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But Stainton did not think so. He urged her on.

"No, you will laugh," said Muriel.

"I should not," he answered her. "I really want to know."

Nevertheless, the illusion of the theatre, which her memory had partially renewed, her self-consciousness finally dispelled, and her conclusion was in lame contrast to her beginning:

"I should just have married him in spite of them all."

Of such material was Stainton's wooing made. Though it may seem but poor stuff to you, it did not seem so to those who wove it, and it was, if you will but reflect upon your own, the material generally in vogue.

Our modern method of courting is, of course, the most artificial phase of modern artificial life. The period of courtship is, for most lovers, what Sunday used to be for the small boy in the orthodox family of the early 'seventies. As he then put on his best clothes for the Sabbath, our men and women now put on their best manners for the courting. As he then put off his real self at church-time, they now lay aside, for this supposedly romantic interlude in an existence presently to return to the acknowledged prosaic, all their crudities. It was thus with Muriel and Stainton.

Not that the latter meant to appear other than he was. His great Plan presumed, indeed, quite the reverse. He was intent that Muriel should admire not his wealth or his reputation, but his inherent worth and the genuine basis for his reputation. He was resolved that she should love not any or all of the things that he might be, but the one thing, the real self, that he had himself made. His fault, according to the prevailing standards, if any fault resulted, consisted only in his insistence upon a too introspectively observed ideal of just what that thing happened to be.

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Nor yet, and this is likewise intrinsic, would the severest scrutiny have revealed in Muriel any realisation of a pose upon her own part. Her aunt, trusting as do most guardians of youth to a natural intuition in the ward, which has no standing in fact, refrained from informing the girl in plain language what it was that Stainton wanted. Mrs. Newberry's fears were ungrounded: the conventional calm had not been disturbed, and Muriel, save for timid smiles at the butcher's boy when he called at the school and furtive glances at the acolytes in church, had never yet known love. Not guessing the truth, Muriel was merely, for the first time, being accorded a glimpse of those kingdoms of this world of which all schoolgirls have had their stolen dreams. With what she saw she was frankly delighted, and when a pretty young girl is frankly delighted, a pretty young girl is obviously not at her worst.

"You look very happy nowadays," said Mrs. Newberry at the luncheon-table, looking, however, not at the subject of her remarks but at the master of her affections, who, chancing to be lunching at home, sat opposite her.

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"I am, Aunt Ethel," said Muriel. "I always have been happy, but I am happier than ever now."

Mrs. Newberry smiled meaningly at Preston, but Muriel could not see the smile, and Preston would not.

"Why is that?" asked Ethel.

"Oh, because."

"Because why?"

"Because I am seeing so much. The city, you know, and these suppers and things. Sitting up until to-morrow. And I do so love the theatres!"

Ethel's smile faded.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Stainton is very kind."

"And generous," put in Preston so unexpectedly that his wife jumped. "Thompson; the salmon."

"I think he's lovely," said Muriel.

"Do you?" Mrs. Newberry was bovine even in her playful moods. "He does really run about like a boy, doesn't he?"

"Well," said Muriel, "I wouldn't say *just* like a boy."

"He seems quite young—he actually seems very young indeed," mused Ethel.

"Seems?" said Preston. "He is."

His positive tone startled Mrs. Newberry into indiscretion.

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"He is fif——" she began, then, catching her husband's eye, she corrected herself: "He must be nearly——"

"He is forty," said Newberry, scowling.

"Oh, Uncle Preston," protested Muriel, "Mr. Holt said——"

"George Holt is a fool," said Newberry, "and always was."

"Your uncle is quite right, Muriel," said Ethel. "Mr. Holt does gossip. Besides, he is not the sort of person a young girl should quote."

"You quote him, Aunt Ethel—often."

"Your aunt," said Preston, "is not a young girl. Mr. Stainton is younger than Holt, I dare say, for he has evidently taken good care of himself, and Holt never takes care of anything, least of all his health."

The air of importance that her uncle and aunt seemed to attach to so trivial a matter as a few years more or less in the age of any man past thirty puzzled Muriel, and she betrayed her bewilderment.

"I don't see how it much matters," she said, "whether he's forty or fifty."

"It doesn't matter in the least," said Newberry. "But you had better make the most of him while you can."

"I don't see why," said Muriel.

"Because he is popular," Preston explained. "There are several women—women and *girls*— [Pg 87] anxious to marry him, and one or other of them is sure to succeed."

Muriel winced. She did not relish the thought of losing her new friend, and she wondered why, if he were really sought after in marriage, he had so much time to devote to her and her aunt and uncle, and why he spoke so little of women to her.

Stainton, indeed, held his tongue about his intentions for just the length of time that, as he had previously concluded, a man must hold his tongue in such matters. If, in the meantime, Muriel heard from both of the Newberrys more interesting stories of his career in the West, and was impressed thereby, if she got from the same reliable source equally romantic accounts of his wealth and was, as the best of us could not in like circumstances help being, a little impressed by these as well, she was, nevertheless, honestly unprepared for his final declaration. She regarded Stainton as a storybook hero, the more so since his conversation never approached the sentimental, and she delighted in his company for the "good time"—it was thus that she described it—which he was "showing her."

In brief, she was at last ready to fall in love with Stainton. Stainton was in love.

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## VI

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### A MAID PERPLEXED

So far as Stainton was privileged to know, the end of this first act in their comedy came about in much the manner designed by him. He moved quietly, as he moved in all the details of his life; he had the gift of precision, and when he arrived at what Sarcey called the *scène à faire*, though he was perhaps more in love, as that term is generally understood, than most lovers, he arrived not at all breathless, and found nothing to complain of in what awaited him.

Mrs. Newberry had ostentatiously deserted him and Muriel in the white-and-gold Newberry drawing-room splendid with spindle-legged mahogany and appropriately uncomfortable. It was evening, an evening that Stainton had taken care should be unoccupied by any disturbing theatre party or other frivolous forerunner to a declaration.

That Ethel and her husband had tacitly agreed to this arrangement, Stainton did not notice as significant. Mrs. Newberry, after the spasm of chaperonage that followed his first unwatched motor drive with Muriel, had tactfully begun to withdraw from the rôle of duenna, and the suitor had consoled himself in the ocular demonstration of the proverb that two are company and three none. Hitherto he had enjoyed his privilege like the temperate man that he was, which is to say that he enjoyed it without abusing it. He belonged by birth to that class of society which, though strong enough in the so-called natural affections, seems to think it indecent to display emotion in public, and he was unwilling, for both his own sake and that of the girl he loved, to hurry an affair that might lose much by speed and gain much by circumspection. Now, however, the time came to test the virtues of his plan of campaign, and Stainton was glad that the combination of the time and the place and the loved one was not marred by any extraneous interference. [Pg 89]

The wooer was at his best. The clothes that are designed for those short hours of the twenty-four when one is at rest without being asleep, became him; they gave full value to his erect figure, his shapely hips, and his robust shoulders; and, since he was about to win or lose that which he now most prized in life, and since he had always felt sure that the only courage he lacked was physical, his strong face looked far younger than its years and his iron-grey eyes shone not with fear, but with excitement.

While he leaned against a corner of the white mantelpiece above the glowing fireplace, so much as it was possible for his upright figure to lean, he was thinking that Muriel, opposite him, was more beautiful than he had ever yet seen her—thinking, but without terror, how dreadful it would be should he lose her and how wonderful should he win. Young enough for her in that kindly light he almost looked and was sure he was; worthy of her, though he felt more worthy than most, he was certain that no man could be. He saw her as he had seen her that first night at the opera, but more desirable. [Pg 90]

Seated in the farther corner of a long, low couch drawn close to the chimney-place and at right-angles to it, three or four rose-red pillows piled behind the suggestion of bare shoulders only just escaping from her gown of grey ninon draped over delicate pink, Muriel's slim body fronted the

dancing fire and warmed in the light that played from the flames. Her blue-black hair waved about her white temples and the narrow lines of her brows; her lips, the lower slightly indrawn, were like young red roses after the last shower of Spring.

He felt again, as he had felt when he saw her in the Newberrys' box, that she was lovely not only with the hesitant possibilities of girlhood at pause before the door of maturity, but because she gleamed with the gleam of an approaching summer night scented and starred. He noted how the yellow rays from a high candelabrum standing near the couch cast what might be an aureole about her head and set it in relief against the distant, drawn curtains, the curtains of ivory plush, which shut the heaven of this drawing-room from the earth of everywhere else. In his every early adventure among the dreams of love, this lonely man of the desert, reacting on his environment, had been less annoyed by the demands of a body that clamoured in vain than by the dictates of a soul that insisted upon the perfection of beauty among beautiful surroundings beautifully encountered. Now he was to put into action forces that would either realise or break those dreams, and, knowing that, he imprinted on his memory this picture of her and always after remembered it: her white hands clasped about the great bunch of violets he had brought to her, the glory of her wayward hair, the curve of her throat, her dark eyes with their curving lashes, her parted lips.

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She had again been asking him of his life in the mining-camps of Alaska and the West and about his solitary journeys prospecting for the gold that it had often seemed was never to be found, and Stainton, wishing not to capitalise his achievements and unable to understand why a girl should interest herself in what was simply a business history, had again evaded her.

"But you must have suffered a good deal," she said.

"Oh, yes," he said; "that is part of the price of Life."

"You did it all," she asked, "to win a fortune?"

"No," he answered, his glance as steady upon hers as it had been that night at the opera. "I did it all to win Life. That has always been what I wanted; that has always been what I never had: Life. I wanted—I scarcely know how to say it: the full, sharp, clean joys of being. You understand?"

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"I think I understand," she said.

"I wanted them. I saw that no man could have them in these days, living as we live, unless he was economically independent and morally straight. I made up my mind to win economic independence and to keep morally straight at any sacrifice."

She drew her fingers a little tighter about the tinfoil wrapping of the violets. Over the purple tops of the flowers, as she raised them toward her face, her intent, innocent face returned his steady scrutiny.

"And you've won?" she asked.

He wished to cross to her, to come to the couch and lean over its back, and, with his lips close to her cheek, whisper his answer. But he would not do that; he had decided that to do that at this point would be to bring about for his benefit an unfair propinquity. Instead, he moved only a step from the mantelpiece and stood upright, his arms folded.

Only a step, but to the girl he seemed somehow to draw much closer. The atmosphere of the room was somehow strained to tension. She saw that his eyes, although they did not waver, softened, and, to fill a pause of which she began to be afraid, she heard herself repeating:

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"And you've won?"

"That," said Stainton, "is for you to say—Muriel."

It was the first time he had called her by her given name. Her eyes fell. She lowered the violets and, looking only at them, raised a hand to finger them. The hand shook.

"For me?" she asked.

If there is one thing in which men are more alike than another, it is the manner of their asking women to marry them. Generally it adds to many pretences the cruelty of suspense. Stainton was not unusual.

"I have won my fight—yes," he said. "I have got the means. Can I gain the end? It's you who must tell me that."

She saw now.

"How can I help?" she faltered.

"I wanted Life," he repeated, and wished that he could see her face. "Life means more than money. Money will protect it, secure it; but Life means Love. Long ago I knew your mother."

Very simply, but directly, he told her how he had loved that other Muriel. His morbid fears he did not describe, but his first romance he sketched with a gentleness that, while she, her heart steadied, looked up at his reposed strength and remembered all the stories that she had heard of his adventurous career, brought a quick mist of tears to her eyes.

"Do you remember," he asked, when his story was finished, "how rudely I looked at you when I first saw you in the Metropolitan Opera House?" [Pg 94]

"It wasn't rude," she said.

"You must have thought it so then."

"I—I didn't know what to think—exactly."

"Well, now you know. It was an astonishing resemblance that made me stare at you."

Her nether lip trembled.

"I didn't know my mother," she said.

"No," said Stainton, "but you are very like her." He waited a moment and then, as her eyes were lowered, went on: "That was a boyish love of mine for her. It was really not love at all—only the rough sketch for what might have been, but never was, a finished picture. But I went away, when your mother repulsed me, with the likeness of her in my heart. I wanted love; I worked to be fit to win love and to keep it once I had won it. Then I came back and saw in that box at the opera the living original of the dream-woman that had all those years been with me."

He came another step nearer.

"I arranged to meet you," he said, "and I knew at last I was really in love. I want to be to you what your mother would not let me be to her. It is you whom I love, not a memory. I love you. I was young then and didn't know. Now I am still young—I have kept myself young—but I *know*." He bent forward and paused. Then, "Muriel," he said. [Pg 95]

The girl drew back. She put her hand before her eyes. The violets rolled to the floor.

"I—I can't tell," she stammered. "I didn't expect—I never thought—"

Even this Stainton had foreseen.

"Then don't hurry now," he said. He drew a chair beside her and quietly took her free hand. "Take your time. Take a week, two weeks, a month, if you choose."

"But it's so new; it's all so new," said Muriel. "I never suspected—Oh, I know girls are always supposed to guess; but really, really, I never, *never*—"

There was genuine pain in her voice.

"I don't know what is expected of most girls," said Stainton; "but of you I shall never expect anything but the truth."

She looked up at him with eyes perplexed.

"Yes—yes, that is just what I want to be: honest. And—don't you see?—that is just why—I am so uncertain—that is just why I can't, right away, tell you—"

He pressed her hand and rose. He did not like to hurt her.

"I ask only that you will think it over," he said. "Will you think it over, Muriel?"

She bowed her head.

"Yes," said she.

"And I may come back in—"

"Yes."

"In two weeks?" [Pg 96]

"In two weeks." Her voice was low and shaken. "Oh, you don't mind if I ask you to go now?" she pleaded.

"I understand," said Stainton. "I'll be back two weeks from this evening. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Stainton," said Muriel.

She waited for him to go. She waited until she heard the street door close behind him. Then she hurried in retreat toward her own room.

But Mrs. Newberry was lying in ambush on the landing when the girl came upstairs—Mrs. Newberry, broad in white satin, with diamonds at her neck and in her hair.

"Well?" asked the aunt.

"Oh!" cried Muriel. She started. "Aunt Ethel!"

"Well?"

"You frightened me," Muriel explained. "I didn't see you until you spoke."

"Well?" persisted Mrs. Newberry.

"Nothing. That's all," said Muriel. "Nothing—only that—"

Ethel became diplomatic:

"Mr. Stainton didn't stay very long?"

"Not very long, Aunty."

Ethel heard something ominous in her niece's tone.

"You didn't—you don't mean to say you sent him *away*?"

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"No, Aunty. Good-night."

"It's early. You're going to bed so early?"

"Yes, I think I'll go to bed. I'm—I'm tired."

"But it's early," repeated Mrs. Newberry, who was accustomed to order her life according to hours and not to reason.

"Is it?" said Muriel.

"It's scarcely ten. The library clock just struck."

"I think it struck some time ago."

"Did it?"

"I think I shall go to bed, Aunty."

Mrs. Newberry sought to bar the way, but she could not succeed in that when she could think of no pretext for detaining the girl, so Muriel brushed past her and went to her own room.

Ethel returned to the library—so called because it contained a few hundred unread books, the newspapers, and all the current magazines. She said to herself that she wanted to think it over, "it" being the opportunity that she had so ceremoniously afforded Stainton and Muriel, together with Muriel's sudden desire for privacy.

Nevertheless, think it over as she would, she made nothing of it. When Preston returned from one of his clubs, several hours later, she was no nearer to a solution than she had at first been, and she told him so.

"I don't understand it," said Ethel. "I don't understand it at all."

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Preston enjoyed his clubs so much that he rarely returned from them in his pleasantest mood.

"Then," he asked, "don't you think it might possibly be just as well for you to let it alone?"

This occurred on a Thursday. As the week progressed and passed and James Stainton did not reappear, Mrs. Newberry found it increasingly difficult to follow the advice that her husband had pointedly suggested. She assailed Muriel several times to no purpose. She wrote to Stainton, asking him to come to dinner, but he replied that he was too desperately engaged in some business that she surmised was vaguely connected with a French syndicate and his mine. Then, Muriel's silence unbroken, she made one or two tentative advances, merely inviting the confidence that she had theretofore demanded as her consanguineous right; but her niece's manner of meeting these advances merely served to simplify the task of wifely obedience.

When light was at last cast on the puzzle, it was Muriel's free will that vouchsafed it. On the Wednesday that fell thirteen days after Stainton's mysteriously terminated call, Muriel entered Ethel's boudoir—it was a pink boudoir—where Mrs. Newberry was attempting, at eleven o'clock in the morning, to dress in time for a two o'clock luncheon.

"Can you spare Marie?" asked Muriel. Marie was Mrs. Newberry's maid, just then fluttering about her mistress, who, her dressing advanced only beyond the ordeal of corsets, was seated, in a grandiose kimono, before mirrors.

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"In two hours and a half perhaps I can," said Ethel. "Why?"

"Because I want to talk with you."

This was odd. It was so odd that Mrs. Newberry should have scented its import; only, it is difficult to scent the import of anything when one has supped late the night before, when the first "rat" has not been nested upon one's head, and when one has but an eighth part of a day in which to make ready for a luncheon.

"Really, Muriel," complained Ethel. "You do choose the most remarkable moments for conversation. It's only eleven o'clock! What on earth can you want to talk about at such an hour?"

Muriel quietly seated herself by the window.

"About Mr. Stainton," she said.

Mrs. Newberry started so violently that a shower of gilt hairpins clattered upon the dressing-table and floor.



"You may go, Marie," she gasped. She waited until the maid had shut the door. Then she turned her gaze full upon her niece. "What is it?" she cried.

"He wants to marry me."

Mrs. Newberry floundered to her feet and rushed upon Muriel. Her flowing sleeves flew back to her sturdy shoulders. She flung plump arms around Muriel's neck.

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"My dear girl!" said she. She kissed the dear girl on both passive cheeks. Then she inquired: "You've had a letter?"

"No," said Muriel. "He asked me."

"But, my dear, he hasn't been here for nearly two weeks. It was—let me see—yes, it will be two weeks to-morrow evening."

"That was when he asked me, Aunty."

Mrs. Newberry's embrace relaxed. She looked hurt.

"And you never told me! I think that implies a lack of confidence—a lack of affection, Muriel."

"I don't know. I wanted to think it over first."

"Think it over! What was there to debate, I should like to know?"

"A good deal, it seemed to me; and anyhow, Aunty, I think this is the sort of thing a girl has to decide for herself—if she can."

"Where ever did you get such notions? A girl never *can* decide it for herself."

Muriel's answering smile was rueful.

"I couldn't, at any rate," she said, "and so, even if I'm late about it, I've come to you."

Mrs. Newberry was reassured. After all, the thing had happened; Muriel's future—so we fatuous moderns reason—was at last secured. According to the custom of her time and class, Ethel had always taken it for granted that a poor girl married to a rich man is as safe as a good girl gone to Heaven—and more certainly comfortable. She became radiant. It was necessary only that they make such decent speed as would prevent any other young woman from interfering.

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"Well," she said, "I'm glad you *have* come, because, since long engagements aren't fashionable any more, your uncle and I must naturally have all the warning possible—for your uncle will, of course, provide the wedding. I think it had better be next month—yes, next month and at St. Bartholomew's."

Muriel's cheek paled. She turned again to the window and looked out.

"I don't think you quite understand," she said. "I'm not sure——"

"Now, don't be silly," interrupted Mrs. Newberry. "I won't hear any foolish talk about a home wedding or a quiet wedding. It isn't the proper thing for a wedding to be quiet; it isn't natural; besides, you have been living here in your uncle's house, and you owe something to his position."

"That's not it." Muriel's back was still turned; her eyes were fixed on the cold rain that was falling.

"Well," asked Mrs. Newberry, in complete bewilderment, "then what *is* it?"

"I am not sure that I love Mr. Stainton."

The plump Mrs. Newberry again rose. Her face was a pretty blank.

"Love?" she repeated, as if she had heard that word somewhere before but could not for the life of her recall where. "*Love*, did you say?"

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"Yes," replied Muriel; "I don't know whether I love him."

"What next?" asked Ethel. "Love? You don't know whether you love him! The idea! You're too young to know anything about it, my child. Of course you love him. You're just too young to know it, that's all."

Muriel displayed a wistful face.

"I'm eighteen."

"A mere baby."

"Then I should think I was too young to marry."

"*Do* you think so?"

"No, only——"

Mrs. Newberry waxed wise.

"As a matter of fact, Muriel, haven't you," she enquired, "often thought of marrying even when

you were younger than you are now?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then!" Mrs. Newberry in the past few weeks had acquired a few of her husband's mannerisms, together with some of his convictions.

But this convincing argument did not settle matters. Muriel again faced the window; she seemed to draw inspiration for her incomprehensible stubbornness from the prospect of dripping Madison Avenue.

"It's not so easy——" she began.

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"Isn't he kind?" demanded Mrs. Newberry.

"Yes, he's kind."

"You certainly think him good-looking, child. In fact, *I* should call him handsome."

"I think he is *almost* handsome, Aunty."

"Of course he is. I have heard lots of women simply *rave* about him. And he is in love with you? You can't deny that?"

"Did you know it, Aunty?"

"How could anyone help knowing it? He shows it all the time. He can't keep his eyes off you."

"Then, why didn't you tell me?"

"Because——Why, it was so evident that we took it for granted you knew."

"We?"

"Your uncle and I, yes."

"Oh! There doesn't seem to be any doubt in *his* mind that he's in love with me."

"Exactly, Muriel; and he is rich—quite rich. Why, there are hundreds of girls in New York who would give their eyes to catch him. Hundreds of them."

"But he is——" Muriel hesitated.

"Yes?"

"He's not young, Aunty."

"What has that to do with it?"

"I don't know, but I should think it might have a good deal to do with it. Don't people say that the young love the young?"

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"And marry them, you mean? Really, my dear, you have such romantic notions! In that case, what's to become of the old?"

"They're supposed to have married before they became old, I should think. Now, I am only eighteen. I don't know—I'm only speculating about it, and I like Mr. Stainton very much—but when you think of a man of his age marrying——"

Again Mrs. Newberry interrupted. She had her position to maintain: her position as Preston Newberry's wife.

"Muriel," she said, "I can guess what is in your mind, but I cannot guess how it got there. You shock me."

"But, Aunty——"

"That is enough. There are *some* things that a young girl should not discuss."

Muriel put her hands to her burning cheeks.

"Oh, you don't understand!" she cried. "You don't understand at all. I don't know what you mean! But he's fifty." She almost sobbed. "I don't care what Uncle Preston says. I *know* he is fifty!"

It was a trying moment for Mrs. Newberry, but she met it bravely. She considered Muriel. Then, in the glass, she considered her own image.

"Look at me," commanded Mrs. Newberry.

Her eyes still suffused with unshed tears, Muriel obeyed.

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"*I*," said her aunt—"do *I* look old?"

She did not look young, but Muriel loved her, and those whom a child loves seldom grow old.

"No," said Muriel, loyally.

"Well," confessed Ethel, "*I* am fifty." She was fifty-two. It was a sacrifice, nobly offered, upon the

altar of family affection. She saw nothing in the future for her niece if Stainton could not be made to suffice. "But," she added, "you must never tell anyone. All I want to explain to you is that fifty is nothing—absolutely nothing at all."

It is, however, the common fate of sacrifices made for family affection to go unrecognised by the family. Muriel, honest within the limits of her limited training, clear-sighted, was unconvinced.

"Anyhow," she decided, "the question isn't whether he is old or young, I suppose. I guess the only question is: Do I love him? I thought all last night perhaps you could answer that, but of course I was wrong. I see that now. I dare say no person can ever really answer such a question but the person that asks it. I was right in the first place: I have to find out for myself—and yet I don't seem able to find out for myself, either."

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## VII

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### FIRE AND TOW

Mrs. Newberry's arguments were unavailing. Her pleas failed and so did her eulogies of Stainton: both of Stainton the hero and Stainton the rich man. Her tears sufficed not. There was no course but to recall her luncheon engagement. Her incompetence in the matter sharpened her tongue.

They quarrelled. Muriel, in a tempest of sobbing anger, fled to her own room; Mrs. Newberry fled to the luncheon.

Upon her return Ethel found that Muriel had gone out. Preston was in his "study," studying the stock reports in the Wall Street edition of his evening paper, and to him she straightway unburdened herself.

"*What* do you think of it?" She breathlessly enquired.

"I think you meddled," said her husband.

"But, Preston, the child came to me. I didn't go to her."

"If you didn't, it was no fault of yours. You've been trying to get at her for God knows how long. Let her be. For Heaven's sake, let her be, Ethel. If you do, she is sure to take him, because I have always carefully given her to understand that she may expect nothing from me. I have been conscientious about that. And she must know that we are doing her a good-sized favour this winter. But if you don't let her alone, she is bound to botch the whole affair."

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He put aside his newspaper and prepared to go to that one of his clubs at which he could obtain the best cocktail. As he was about to leave the house, Muriel entered it. Preston smiled.

"Hello," he said. "Been for a walk?"

The girl was flushed and patently troubled.

"Yes, Uncle Preston," she said.

"Hum. Just going myself. How's the weather?"

"Lovely," murmured Muriel. She wanted to hurry to her room.

"What? Why, when I looked out a bit ago, I was sure it was raining."

"Oh, yes; I believe it is raining. I didn't notice."

Preston chuckled. He put out a thick thumb and forefinger and pinched her cheek.

"I've always heard that love was blind," he said, "but nowadays it seems to be water-proof, too. Look here, my dear: your aunt has been dropping a hint or two to me, and I congratulate you."

"On what?" asked Muriel, bristling into immediate rebellion.

Again Preston chuckled.

"Tut, tut!" he said: he always treated her as if she were the child that he had always maintained to his wife she was not. "You know well enough. He's a fine fellow and well-to-do. Even if we could afford to keep you on here indefinitely, which of course we can't, it would be a good job. Lucky girl!"

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He went out after that and left his wife's niece free again to hide herself. But not entirely. Ethel, unable to resist her desire for finality, soon tapped at Muriel's door.

"Muriel!" she called.

For some time there was no answer, though Mrs. Newberry made sure that she heard sounds within the room.

"Muriel!"

"Yes. Who is there?"

"It's me—Aunt Ethel."

"Yes, Aunt Ethel?"

"Well, Muriel—are you all right?"

"Quite, thanks."

"Don't you want anything?"

"No."

"Nothing at *all*?"

"Nothing at all, thank you."

Ethel hesitated.

"But, Muriel——"

The girl apparently waited for her aunt to finish the sentence that Ethel had not completed.

"Muriel——"

"Yes?"

Ethel softly tried the door: as she had supposed, it was locked.

"O, Muriel, do open the door and let me in."

"Why?"

"Because, Muriel."

"But why? I'm—I'm dressing."

"But—surely you know why, Muriel. Why won't you confide in me?"

There was a long wait for the answer to this question, but the answer, when it came, was resolute enough:

"I've nothing to confide. Please go away now, Aunt Ethel, and leave me alone. Please do."

Ethel went. She returned, of course, from time to time, whenever she could think of a new excuse or a new suggestion; but she was always worsted.

Muriel did not descend to dinner that night until she was sure that Mr. Newberry, whose deterrent attitude she instinctively counted upon, was there with her aunt. She contrived to be left alone not once with Ethel. It was the habit of the members of the Newberry household to breakfast together only by chance, which meant that they generally ate separately. When Thursday's luncheon was announced, Muriel sent down word that she had a headache.

"*What* do you do when a girl locks her door on you?" asked Ethel of her husband.

"They never lock their doors on me," said Preston.

"Do be serious. What in the world do you make of all this?"

"My dear," answered Newberry, "the only thing I am bothered about is what *you* may already have made of it. I'm afraid you have made a mess."

"But, Preston——"

"There is nothing to be done now but to wait, my dear."

So it befell that when, exactly at nine o'clock that evening, Stainton's card was sent up to Miss Stannard, Miss Stannard's guardians, one of whom stayed long in the library with ears vainly intent, were as much at sea regarding their ward's decision as was Stainton himself.

Muriel's own emotional condition was no more enlightened. Like all young people, she had had her visions of romance, and, like the visions of most young people, hers had been uninstructed, misdirected, misapplied. All women, it has been said, begin life by having in their inmost heart a self-created Prince Charming, who proves the strongest rival that their destined husbands have to endure. Such a prince was as much Muriel's as he is other girls'! She had created him unknowingly from the books she had read, from the pictures she had seen, out of blue sky and sunshine and the soft first breezes of Spring: the stuff of dreams. But she was eighteen and no longer in school, and Stainton had given her a glimpse of the great happy thing that she accepted as life.

What lacked? Something. While she descended the stairs she counted his attributes in her aching brain. He was handsome, brave, well esteemed. If he was not young, he did not seem anything but young. What was youth, that it should be essential? What did it amount to if it were but the unit of measurement for a life—a mere figure of speech—something simply verbal? This man had, it appeared, the reality without the name. What was this quality worth if its virtue resided in its

name and not in its substance? Why should she even ask these questions—and why, when she asked, could she find no answer?

She paused. It struck her suddenly that the fault might lie in her. Perhaps it was she that lacked. Perhaps—as a traveller may see an unfamiliar landscape by a lightning flash—she saw this now; the loss might be not in Stainton; it might be something that she had not yet acquired.

Therein, to be sure, was the clew to the muddle. Nearer than that lightning flash of the situation she did not come. Love, as we know it in our civilisation, is not an element: it is a composite. In this girl, descending to meet the man that wanted to marry her and even now ignorant of the answer she should give him, there lay the Greater Ignorance. Companionship, affection, kindly feeling—all these things and more—she had for him; but the omnipotent force that welds and dominates and forges these elements into one, unified, spiritual, intellectual, and bodily love, the law that begets this and nourishes it—this she did not as yet know, had never known.

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The Newberry drawing-room was as it had been two weeks before. The crackling fire danced over its gilt-and-white prettiness, the heavy, ivory curtains, which folded behind her, shut out all the world.

Stainton rose from a seat beside the fire, much as if he had been there since last she saw him. The interval of a fortnight seemed as nothing. She noticed again how tall and strong and fine he seemed, how virile, how much the master, not only of his own fate but of himself. He came forward with outstretched hands.

"Have you thought things over?" he asked.

There was no manoeuvring now, no backing and filling. The time for pretence was passed.

"Yes," she said. "I have thought of nothing else, and yet—and yet——"

His brows contracted slightly, but he kept his steady hand upon the tight rein by which he was accustomed to drive himself.

"And yet you aren't sure?" he supplied. "You have not been able to make up your mind?"

She hung her head. On the edge of the hearth-rug she traced a stupid figure with the toe of her bead-embroidered slipper.

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"I can't tell," she said, "I've tried. I've tried very hard——"

"To love me?"

"No." She wished to be honest; she determined upon being honest. She owed him that, even should it hurt him. "No," she said, "not to love you; for if I had to try to love you, it wouldn't be real love at all, would it? What I tried to find out was whether I do love you now."

It was on his lips to say that, as surely as trying to love would not create love, so, if love was, it need not be sought. But she raised her face when she ended, and, when the light fell upon that, he forgot all casuistry. Her slim figure just entering upon womanhood, her blue-black hair, her damp red lips and her great dark eyes: she was as he had seen her first, like an evening in the woods, he reflected: warm and dusky and bathed in the light of stars.

Quite suddenly and wholly without premeditation he came to her and seized her hot palms in his cool hands. For years he had mastered passion; now, at this sight of her after the two weeks' separation, passion mastered him. The rein had snapped.

"Muriel," he said, "I can make you love me. You don't know—there are things you don't know. I can make you love me. Do you hear that? Muriel? Answer! Do you understand? I will make you love me. I will!"

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She looked up at his face. It was alight as she had never yet seen any man's. Then, before she had gathered her breath to give him an answer, she was seized by him. She was crushed to him; she was held tight in his strong arms. She was hurt, and, as she was hurt, their lips met.

The miracle—oh, she was sure now that it was the miracle—happened. Something new clutched at her throat. Something new, wonderfully, terrifyingly, deliciously new, gripped at her heart and set her whole body athrill and trembling. The blood pounded in her temples. She tried to look at him, but a violet mist covered her eyes and hid him.

"Kiss me!" she was whispering as his lips left hers. "Kiss me again. I know now. I love you!"

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## VIII

[Pg 115]

### "THE WORLD-WITHOUT-END BARGAIN"

And so they were married. Mrs. Newberry had her way: they were married within the month and within the church.

Preston's troubles, meanwhile, were hard to bear, and were not borne in silence. By faith, as has

been noted, he was a Presbyterian; but by reason of his social position it was incumbent to attend occasionally—so often, in fact, as he went to church at all—an establishment of the Protestant Episcopal persuasion. Yet it appeared, when he came to arrange for the wedding of his wife's niece, which was the first he had ever arranged for, that there were ecclesiastical distinctions about weddings concerning which he had never previously dreamed. There were certain churches where one was expected to be a regular Sunday attendant; but when it came to a wedding, these would not serve: a wedding, to be socially correct, must occur in one of two or three churches in which, apparently, nothing else ever occurred. They seemed to be set aside for the exclusive business of marrying, and they married only exclusive people. Through one's sexton one rented one of these as one rents the Berkeley Lyceum, save that, in the matter of the wedding church, its rector is thrown in for good measure; then, when one proposed to introduce one's friend Buggins, the composer, to play the wedding-marches, one was told that only the church's regular organist was permitted to play the church's superb organ, and that, if one really required music, the regular organist could be hired at so much—and "so much" was not so pleasantly indefinite as it sounded.

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"I never before realised what my father-in-law went through for me," said Preston.

"Things are never so hard as you think they'll be," said his wife in an effort at comfort.

"Things are always worse," replied the uncomforted Newberry. "Thank the Lord, I'll never have to arrange for another marriage. I thought that was Heaven's business, anyhow: I thought marriages were made in heaven. I'd rather be the advance agent of a minstrel show."

Still, in some fashion or other—and Mrs. Newberry and the papers were satisfied that it was the very best fashion—the thing was accomplished. There was an immediate "Engagement Dinner" given by Ethel; there were other dinners given by Jim; there were luncheons given by friends of Muriel and the Newberrys; then, at last, there was Stainton's bachelor-supper to George Holt and the ushers-to-be, whom Holt had collected, held at Sherry's, whence everybody except the host departed in one of the four socially requisite stages of drunkenness, and so the climax, with the hired church, the hired parson, the frock coats, the staring eyes, the odour of flowers, the demure bridesmaids, and the hired organist playing Wagner and Mendelssohn and "The Voice That Breathed O'er Eden."

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Stainton did not long remember all these things, was never even aware that at this wedding, as at all the other public demonstrations that go by the same name, the young girls wondered what it portended and the young men smirked because they knew. After a brief engagement in which the flames of his desire had grown in expectant intensity upon the fuel of those minor favours which conventional engagements make the right of the man, he was hurried into the church in no state of mind that a sane man would willingly describe as sane. He remembered only that he felt white and solemn; that he had an interminable wait in the vestry with Holt, a silently reconciled best-man, and a second wait at the altar rail, where he was the centre of interest and commiseration until the bride appeared, when he fell to an importance scarcely equal to that of the clergyman and far below that of the pew opener. Only these things he remembered, and that Muriel, with her sweetly serious face admirably set off by the white in which she was clad, looked all that he wished her to look and strangely spiritual besides. The next event of which he was at all certainly conscious was the hurried reception and the swiftly following bridal breakfast where Preston Newberry made truly pathetic references to some "lamp of sunshine" that had been "filched forever" from the Newberry home.

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Preston was more than a little relieved. He found it in his heart to wish Muriel well.

"Good-bye, youngster," he said, when she came to him in her going-away gown. "Good-bye." ("For the sake of goodness, Ethel, stop that snivelling!") "He's a fine old buck and he'll be kind to you, I'm sure." ("My dear, *stop* it! Hasn't the girl got what you've wanted her to have ever since you set eyes on him?")

Muriel heard the asides addressed to Mrs. Newberry and winced at the adjective openly applied to Jim, but she bit her lip and tossed her head and went away radiant for the first month of their honeymoon in Aiken, where she was happy with new and tremendous delights that received and asked and gave and demanded and grew.

She had not before adequately guessed at happiness of this sort. It was as if her material world had always been at twilight—a soft, luminous, fragrant twilight, but twilight nevertheless—and that now, without the intervention of darkness, there had come the undreamed of wonder of dawn. She ran forth to meet the sunlight. She was eager, primal. She opened her arms to it. She gave herself to it because she gloried in it. Unsuspected capacities, unknown emotions welled in her, and she gave them forth and seized their purchase price. Her husband became in her eyes something glorious and marvellous. There was no more question of his years; she thought no more of that than any Greek girl would have questioned the youth of a condescending Zeus. He revealed; he seemed even to be the maker of what he revealed. She knew love at last; she was certain that she knew love. She was in love with love.

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For Stainton, and strangely in the same manner, that same magic prevailed. Alone with her he could not keep his hands from her loveliness; before strangers his eyes ravished it—his eyes shone and his cheeks flushed and his brain turned dizzy with the thought that this was his, all his own. In the desert of his life he had come finally to the long desired oasis. The journey to it, the waiting, the molten moons, and the weary afternoons of march had not robbed him of the ability

to reach it and enjoy it. He was young—he was still young!

"Let's climb the hill and see the sunset," he said to her.

This was toward the end of their second week. They were in their sitting room in the hotel, Jim seated, in flannel shirt and walking trousers, but Muriel still in a flowing kimono, at rest on the floor, her head, with its wealth of blue-black hair, resting on her husband's knee, her arms about his waist.

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"No, no," she answered. "I don't want to see the sunset. Sunsets are so sad. They mean the end of something, and I don't want to think of endings, dear. We mustn't think of them, because we are at our beginning."

He smiled and stroked her hair, and the touch, as always, thrilled him to a great tenderness.

"Beginning?" he echoed. "Yes, that's it. It must be the beginning of something that will never have an end."

Her dusky eyes glowed.

"Never!" she repeated, and then, as an unreasoned wistfulness shot through her, she whispered: "It never will end, will it, Jim?"

"How could it, sweetheart?"

"But I mean it will always go on like this—just like this. I don't want us just to grow used to each other, just stupid and merely satisfied—just—just affectionate and fond."

"We can never come to that. We love too much, Muriel."

"Then don't let's forget ever," she pleaded, her arms tightening. "It must all be honeymoon, forever and forever."

He raised her face and kissed her.

"Always," he said—"always morning. We will never let the shadows lengthen; we will hold back the hands of the clock." He kissed her again. "You know that we will?" he asked.

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"I know—I know," she answered.

They had no quarrels. There was only one matter in which she deviated so much as a hair's breadth from his ideal of her and there was but one occasion when she was hurt by any act of his.

The first of these affairs sprang from a conversation started by a letter with a blue French twenty-five-centime stamp upon it, which their always discreet waiter brought to the rooms one morning with the coffee. It had been forwarded from New York.

"What's that?" asked Muriel.

Stainton had been reading with his iron-grey brows in a pucker and a smile on his lips.

"It is a Frenchman trying to write English," he said. "He doesn't succeed."

"Yes, but what *is* it?"

"Only business, dear."

"Then I ought to see it," said Muriel.

Stainton laughed.

"What?" he said.

"If it is business, I ought to see it," she repeated.

"Trouble your little head with such matters? Not much."

She came to him as if to kiss him, then quickly seized the letter and ran laughing away. He pursued her, laughing, too; but she was more agile than her husband, and she managed easily to evade him until her eyes had caught enough of the letter to enable her to guess its entire contents.

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"So they want to buy your mine?" she asked. "They say their expert has returned and reported"—she glanced again at the letter as his fingers closed on it—"reported favourably."

"Yes," he said; "it's a French syndicate, some wealthy men in Lyons, and they want to buy the mine."

"But you won't sell?"

"If I can get my figure, I will."

"Your mine?"

"Our mine."

For that she kissed him.

"But, if it's ours, I have something to say about it, and I won't let you."

"Why not?" he asked, smiling at her pretty assumption.

"Because I think it would be horrid of you to sell it after all the years you spent looking for it."

"I wasn't looking for it on its own account, dear; I was looking for it because of what it would bring me."

"I wish you'd take me to see it."

"It's a dull place, Muriel."

"I wish you'd take me. I wouldn't find it dull."

"I shall take you to France instead."

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"To sell the mine?"

"To try."

"Horrid!" she pouted.

"But, dearest," he explained, "I don't want to have a mine on my hands. I have you."

"Do I keep you busy?"

"You are a gold mine. Don't you see? I want to be free. If I can get my price, we shall be rich."

"I thought we were rich now."

"With a mine run by an agent, yes. But if I sold to this syndicate—now, you mustn't talk about this outside, you know—"

"Of course I know."

"Or write it home."

"Of course not."

"Well, then, if these people buy, we shall be rich without any more agents or any more work. I have had enough of mining to make me certain that I don't want to chain any son of mine down to the business."

"Any——" The word turned her suddenly white. In the midst of the intimacies of the honeymoon, reference to children painted her cheeks with scarlet.

Stainton smiled indulgently. He put a strong arm about her and patted her shoulder.

"Yes, any sons, dear," he said. "Did you never think of that? Did you never think how sweet it would be if we two that are one should really see ourselves made one in a little baby?"

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To his amazement she burst into tears.

"I don't want a baby!" she wailed, her head on his shoulder, her hands clasped behind him. "I don't want a baby. No, no, no!"

He tried to persuade her, but he could scarcely make himself heard until he abandoned the topic.

"There, there," he said, "it's all right. I wouldn't hurt you, dearest; you know I wouldn't. There will be nothing to worry about."

His heart ached because he had hurt her. He told himself that he should have remembered that her present nervous condition could not be normal. He upbraided himself for making to her, no matter how long he might have been married to her, a frank proposition that her sensitive nature probably repelled only because of the matter-of-fact way in which he had suggested what, he thought, should have been more delicately put. He did not change his design; he merely ceased to speak of it. Throughout the world the only persons not consulted about the possible bearing of children are the only persons able to bear them. Stainton no longer made an exception of Muriel. He decided that the best management of these matters was to leave them to chance for their occurrence and nature for their acceptance.

This conversation took place a week or more after their verbal banishment of sunsets. On the night following, Jim at the demand of his abounding health, fell asleep earlier than usual and slept, as always, soundly; but his wife chanced to be nervous and restless. She lay long awake and she was lonely. Twice she wished to rouse him for her comforting; twice she refrained. When, finally, she did sleep, her sleep was heavy, and she awoke late to find him gone. She hurried into the sitting-room, but he was not there, and it was quite ten minutes later when he returned, fully dressed and glowing, a newspaper in his hand.

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"Where on earth have you been?" she asked. She had crawled back into bed, and she looked very beautiful as she lay there, her black hair wide upon the pillows and the lacy sleeves of her night-dress brushed high on her wide-flung arms.

"Downstairs. You were fast asleep and you looked so comfy I hadn't the heart to waken you. It's a wonderful morning——"



"But, Jim, I woke up all alone! I was afraid!"

He sat on the bed beside her. He took her in his arms, flattered. He gave her the chuckling consolation that the strong, knowing their strength, vouchsafe the weak. He was sorry that she should have felt badly, but he was immensely proud that she should be dependent.

"Too bad, too bad!" he said. "But it won't happen again. Next time I'll either rouse you or else sit tight till your dear eyes open of their own accord."

He was still holding the newspaper in one of his embracing hands. It rustled against her back, and, freeing herself, she saw it. [Pg 126]

"What's that?" she asked.

"A newspaper, of course. I thought I should like to see what was going on in the world. It suddenly struck me that I hadn't looked at a newspaper since I read the notice of our wedding—five hundred years ago."

But Muriel pouted.

"Then," she said, "I don't see why you should begin now."

"One has to begin sometime."

"I don't see why. Is anything between us different to-day from yesterday?"

"Certainly not, sweetheart."

"Well, I thought we weren't going to be like other people. I thought we were always going to be enough to each other."

"We are. Of course we are. But you were asleep, and, anyhow, I said I was never going to run away again. Besides, Muriel——"

"I don't see why," Muriel maintained.

He tried to quiet her with kisses. He held her close and pressed her face to his.

During all that month, these were the only occasions when they so much as approached a difference of opinion. They lived, instead, in that crowded winter resort, like a man and a girl made one upon a new island in a deserted sea. They walked, hand in hand, and, as it seemed to them, heart to heart, through a wonderful world that was new to them. Happiness sparkled in their eyes and trembled at their lips. There were times when their happiness almost made them afraid. Heaven was very near. [Pg 127]

Then, as the month ended, the blasting idea came to Muriel: she was going to have a child.

It came like that. Just when everything was perfect, just when love had realized itself. The thought lay beside her on a morning that she had expected to wake to so differently. Muriel felt as if it were the thought that had wakened her.

She cast a frightened look at Stainton, who was lying beside her, his iron-grey hair disordered, his mouth slightly open, snoring gently.

"Jim!" she said. She clutched at his pajama jacket and tried to shake him. "Jim! Jim!"

He awoke, startled. He rubbed his eyes:

"Eh? What?"

"Jim!"

Then he saw her face.

"My God! What is it, dearie?"

She gasped her fear.

"Muriel!" he cried, and held her tight to his heart. His first feeling was a flash of gratitude: his desire had been granted; he was to be the father of a child.

But Muriel only clung to him and cried. She did not want a baby. She was horrified at thought of it. She was panic-stricken. [Pg 128]

Stainton watched her grief with a sore heart and essayed to soothe it; yet, all the while, his heart swelled with a reasonless pride that appeared to him supremely reasonable: he had performed the Divine Act; within the year he would see a living soul clothed in his own flesh and moulded in his own image. Like hers, his eyes, though from a vastly different cause, were dimmed by tears.

"My dear, my dear!" he whispered. "O, my dear!"

Muriel, broken-hearted, wept hysterically.

Stainton stroked her blue-black hair. All women were like this, he reflected; it was a law of nature. It was the same law that, in the lower animals, first drove the female to repulse the male and then submit to him. In mankind it began by making the woman dread the accomplishment of

her natural destiny and ended by awakening the maternal instinct, seemingly so at variance with its preceding action.

Suddenly Muriel looked up and saw his expression. Hers grew wild.

"You—did you know it would be?" she stammered.

"There, there!" said Stainton, stroking her hair.

She drew herself free.

"You did know!"

Stainton prepared to yield to the natural law.

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"Of course, I didn't *know*, dear. How could I be certain?"

"Oh, but you were, you were!" she cried. "You knew. And I didn't. I didn't know! I didn't know! And you did—*you!*"

"Dearest," said Stainton. He tried to take her hand.

She was sitting straight up in bed, looking down at him, her hair falling over her nightgown.

"And you told me I wouldn't—You told me it wouldn't be!" she accused.

"I?"

"Yes. Yes, you did. You said there would be nothing to worry about. Those were your very words, Jim."

"Well, but, dear, there won't be anything to worry about."

"Nothing to worry about!" she repeated. She put her fingers to her temples. "Not for *you*, of course!"

Stainton was hurt: "Dearie, you know that if I could—"

"And anyhow," she interrupted, "you didn't mean that. You meant me to think what I did think."

He felt that, in a sense, she was right: he had meant at least to quiet her, to divert her thoughts. He was ashamed of that. He sought to comfort her.

"Perhaps you are mistaken," he said.

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"No, no!" she said. She got up and, slipperless, began to pace the room.

Stainton struggled to his elbow.

"But, dearie," he said, seeking relief in logic, "you must have known that when a girl married, she must expect—it was expected of her—it was her duty—"

She continued to walk, her head bent.

"Yes," she answered; "but I didn't know she would have to right away, or when she didn't want to, or—"

Genuinely amazed and genuinely pained, Stainton swung his legs from the covers and sat on the edge of the bed, his hands clasped between his knees, his mouth agape.

"Sweetheart," he asked, "don't you love me?"

"Of course, I love you, Jim."—She was still walking.

"Then what did you think marriage was for?"

She stopped before him. "I thought it was for love," she said; and, crumpling at his feet, put her face upon his knees.

He bent over her, stroking her hair, calling her by the names that they had invented for each other, waiting for the natural law to assert itself again and trying, meanwhile, to alleviate her apprehensions.

"Perhaps, after all, you are mistaken."

This was the burden of his consolation.

Nevertheless, she was not mistaken, and the succeeding days proved it. Nor was the natural law swift in asserting itself.

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"Don't you think," he once tried to urge the law, "that it would be beautiful if we should have a little baby?"

"I sha'n't be beautiful!" she wailed. "I shall lose my looks. I—"

"Muriel!"

"Yes, I shall. I know. I have seen it—on the street—lots of places. I shall grow—I shall—And all

my lovely clothes!—Oh!"—She broke off and hid her eyes—"I shall grow vulgar looking and horrid!"

They were walking along a country lane, and Stainton glanced about nervously, fearing that her words, spoken in a tone altogether unrestrained, would certainly be heard by more ears than his own. The road, however, was empty. He drew her aside to a spot where the woods met the lane and where, a few paces to the left of the lane, the trees hid them. He took her into his arms.

"Muriel," he said, "if I could go through this for you, I would; you know that."

"I know you can't go through it for me," she wept, "and so it's easy enough for you to say."

"No," said Jim, "I can't go through it for you, and so you see, it must be God's will that it should be as it is to be."

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She was worn out by the days of worry, but she made one more appeal.

"Jim," she said, "can't you do something else for me?"

He knitted his brows.

"Something else?" he wondered. "I can love you; I can back you up with all the love of my body and brain and soul. You may always count on that, sweetheart."

"But"—her eyes looked straight into his—"can't you *do* something?"

He understood. He fell back a step, his face grey.

"Muriel!" he whispered.

"I've read of such things in the papers," she said.

"Muriel!"

His eyes were so horrified that she hung her head.

"Oh, it's wrong; I know it's wrong," she said. "But, oh, if you knew how afraid I was of this and how I hate and how—O, Jim, Jim!"

She tottered forward, and his arms received her.

"Muriel, my dear wife," he said. "My own dear little girl, to think that when God has put a life into our keeping, you—Why, Muriel, that is murder!"

That word won Stainton's victory. Muriel succumbed. For her it was like the safe passing of one of those physical crises when the patient had rather die than face the pain of further living; for him it was the sealing of his happiness.

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## IX

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### ANOTHER ROAD

It was a few days later that Muriel, the reconciled, decided that she wanted to leave Aiken.

"Don't you think," she asked, for she had come unconsciously often to use phrases characteristic of Jim, "that a change of scene would be good for us both?"

Stainton had not thought so. He had wandered so much in his life that, now wandering was no longer a necessity of life, he was tired of it. Besides, he was eminently satisfied with Aiken.

"I don't know," he said. "I think it's splendid here. Haven't we been—aren't you happy, dear?"

Muriel was looking out of the window of their hotel sitting-room.

"Of course I'm happy," she said in a low voice. "At least," she added, "I know I ought to be, and I know I never knew what happiness was till I had you. It was only that I thought it would be—perhaps it would be good for me—now—if we travelled."

Stainton cursed himself for a negligent brute.

"What a beast I am!" he said, his arm encircling her waist. "We shall go wherever you want, and we shall go to-morrow."

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Muriel smiled ruefully.

"Perhaps," she submitted, "the real reason is only that I've always wanted so to travel and have never had the chance before."

But Stainton would hear of no reason but her first. He upbraided himself again for his stupidity in not guessing her need before she could have given it expression.

"I've been cruel to you!" he declared.

She stopped him with a swift embrace.

"You're never anything," she contritely vowed, "but just darling to me. I only thought——"

"I know, I know. Where shall we go, Muriel? How about France? I ought to see that syndicate, you know: I ought to meet those men personally. Then there's Paris. I have always longed for Paris myself, and now I shall have you for my guide there."

"Your guide, Jim?"

"Well, you speak French like a book, and I have forgotten nearly all of the little I ever learned."

"I speak school-French," Muriel corrected him.

"At any rate," he assured her, "yours is fluent, and I can only stammer in the language. Then, too," he went on, "there will be the trip across. That will be good for you. Sea air ought to be good for you." She winced, and so he hurried to add: "I think I need a bracer, too.—Are you a good sailor, Muriel?"

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"I don't know. I've never been on the ocean. Are you?"

"I used to be." His eyes darkened. "It's a good many years since I have tried the water. But I know I shall be all right. I am in such splendid shape. Where is a newspaper? Wait a minute; I'll ring for one. Aren't you glad for newspapers now? They carry shipping advertisements, you see. We'll look up the sailings. We have found our first five heavens in America; we must find the sixth in France, and then we must come back here so that our seventh will happen on American soil."

Considering the fact that he did not wish to go, he was self-sacrificingly energetic. He was so energetic that they left Aiken on the next morning and, three days later, were aboard their steamer.

The Newberrys were out of town, still enjoying the rest that they had earned by settling Muriel for life. George Holt was, however, there and had come all the way to Hoboken to see them off.

"And as a German steamship captain once said to me when I asked him to lunch with me at my club," explained Holt, "it's a terribly long way from Hoboken to America."

"It was good of you to come," said Muriel, while the crowd of second-class passengers and the friends of passengers jostled about the first-class promenade deck. "Don't you wish you were coming along?"

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"Better," said Stinton, already in his steamer cap.

"Thanks, no," said Holt, and then, as the siren blew: "If you'd asked my advice before you bought your tickets, old man, I'd have told you: 'Don't go to sea; but if you do go, don't play cards; but if you do play cards, cut the cards. They'll cheat you anyhow, but it'll take longer.'"

He waved a plump farewell and bared a bald head and waddled down the gang-plank. The band began to play, and Stinton and his wife went to their stateroom to unpack: they were travelling without a maid because Muriel had said something about wanting to secure one in France.

By sunrise next morning the *Friedrich Barbarossa* was racing through the grey Atlantic with even speed. It was late winter—it was really early spring—and she had already encountered a storm and heavy seas, but the lean ocean express dove through the former and rode the latter as easily as if she had been a railway train running on tried rails along a perfect roadbed. There was no reason in the world why anybody should be sick aboard her; few others were sick; yet, Stinton, on that second day out, remained below.

He could not account for it. He did not like to confess it. He especially hated to confess, when he awoke to see his wife putting the finishing touches to her toilet in the far corner of their big stateroom. But this was manifestly a case where discretion must triumph over valour: he no sooner got to his feet than he got off them again.

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"It's no use," he sighed. "I don't know what it was. I wish they didn't have such good dinners on this boat, for it must have been something I ate."

Muriel was all consolation.

"Let me ring for the steward to bring your breakfast here," she said.

"Not if you don't want to kill me! Don't mention food again, please—I wonder if that lobster were just fresh."

She insisted for a long time that she would remain below with him, but he overruled her. He said that the open air would be good for her, even if she did not seem to need it, and he meant that, although he meant also—what he dared not say—that he wanted to struggle alone with his malady. Finally, therefore, Muriel descended to the big dining saloon alone and surprisedly found herself breakfasting with enjoyment, in spite of her husband's absence.

She walked the long sweep of the promenade deck and sat for a while in her steamer chair, next Jim's, where, for a few beautiful hours on the evening before, Jim had sat with her. She read a little from a frothy novel that fell short of the realities of love as she knew it, and failed to touch on that great reality which still so heavily oppressed her; and she watched the long, oily swell of

the now green waters, beating to crests of foam, here and there, and forming an horizon-line for all the world like distant mountain-peaks seen, as Stainton had so often seen such peaks, from a peak that is higher than them all. She went to look after Jim every quarter of an hour, but, just before the band began to play on deck and the deck-stewards came smilingly about with their trays of bouillon and sandwiches, she found him sleeping and resolved not again to disturb him. She knew that she was very lonely, but she lunched on herring salad, clam chowder, farced turkey-wings, oysterplant ménagère, succotash, biscuit japonais and nougat parfait. She had finished and was sitting idly at her table watching the awkward motions with which a line of otherwise commonplace passengers walked by on their way upstairs, when her notice was caught by a man whose gait had all the certainty of a traveller upon a level road.

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He was tall and slender, with a figure altogether built for grace and agility; but what especially impressed her was his air of abounding youth. His face was, in fact, that of a mere boy—a boy not five years her senior. It was a perfect oval, that face, flushed with health and alight with freshness. Even the fiercely waxed little blond moustache above its full red lips failed to give it either age or experience, and the clear eyes, intensely blue, looked on all they met with the frank curiosity of the young that are in love with life. They met Muriel's own interested scrutiny and, when they answered it with an honest smile, whipped a sudden blush into her pale cheeks.

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Muriel hastened from the saloon. She went to look after Jim; but Jim still slept.

She went on deck again. She knew that the blond young man would be there, though how she knew it she could not guess, and yet she argued that there was no reason why his presence should banish her from the free air.

She sat down. She saw him coming past, on a walk about the deck, and looked away. The second time he passed she glanced at him, and he smiled and raised his steamer cap. A gust of wind fluttered her rug, and he stooped to rearrange it.

"Thank you," stammered Muriel. "It's not necessary, really. The steward——"

The young man bowed. It was a bow that, in New York, would have struck her as absurdly elaborate; here she liked it.

"But it is, I assure you, a pleasure," he protested.

He spoke English without an accent, but with a precision that, for all its ease, betrayed a Teutonic parentage and education.

"Thank you," repeated Muriel, and she blushed again.

The young man stood before her, his arms folded, swaying in serene certainty with the rolling rhythm of the boat.

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"May I sit down?" he asked, indicating, with a gesture of his hand, the row of empty chairs beside her.

Muriel made, by way of reply, what she conceived to be a social masterstroke.

"Certainly," she answered; "but I am here only for a few moments. I'll soon have to be running downstairs—I mean 'below'—to look after my husband."

The stranger's handsome face expressed concern, yet the concern, it immediately appeared, was not because of Muriel's marital state, but because of her husband's physical plight.

"I am so sorry," he said, taking Jim's chair. "He is ill then, your husband?"

Muriel did not seem to like this.

"Not very," said she. "He is"—she searched for a phrase characteristic of Stainton—"he is just a bit under the weather."

"So," sighed the stranger, unduly comprehending. "Ah, perhaps Madame has made more voyages than has he?"

"No, this is the first trip across for both of us."

"Indeed? But you seem to be so excellent a sailor! Is it only youth that makes you so?"

"I don't know." She was clearly, her will to the contrary, a little flattered. "I seem to take naturally to the water."

"But not so your husband!"

"He will be all right to-morrow."

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"Only to-day he is, your husband, not all right? I am so sorry. Perhaps he is not so young as you are?"

Muriel felt herself again flushing. She at once became more angry at her anger than she was at what, upon reflection, she decided to be nothing more than frank curiosity on the part of her interlocutor.

"Of course he is young!" she heard herself saying.

The stranger either did not observe her emotions or did not care to show that he observed them. He launched at once upon an unrestrained flow of ship talk. It seemed that he was an Austrian, though of Hungarian blood on his mother's side. He had gone into the army, was an officer—already a captain, she gathered—and he had been serving for some months as an attaché of his country's legation in Washington. Now he had been transferred to the legation at Paris. Muriel noted that he spoke with many gestures. She tried to dislike these as being un-American, and when she found it hard to dislike what were, after all, graceful adjuncts to his conversation and frequent aids to his adequate expression, she was annoyed and tried to indicate her annoyance.

"I thought you were a soldier?" she said.

With another European bow he produced a silver case engraved with his arms, drew from it a card, which he handed to Muriel. The card announced him as Captain Franz Esterházy von B. von Klausen.

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"But yes," he said. "Please."

Muriel slipped the card into her belt.

"You seem to like the diplomatic service better," she said.

Von Klausen shrugged.

"I go where I am sent," said he.

"Would you ever go to war?" she persisted.

"If I had to. Why not?"

"And fight?"

"Dear lady, but yes. I do not like, though, to fight, for war is what one of your great generals said: it is Hell."

"Yet you went into the army?"

"Because all my family have for generations done thus. I was born for that, I was brought up for that, and when I came to know"—he extended his palms—"I had to live," he concluded.

This was scarcely Muriel's ideal of a soldier. She changed the conversation.

"Of course you know Europe perfectly?" she enquired.

"Not Russia," answered von Klausen; "but Germany, France, Spain, Italy and England—yes. You will travel much?"

Muriel did not know; very likely they would. They would do whatever Mr. Stainton—Mr. Stainton was her husband—elected: she always did, always wanted to do, whatever her husband elected.

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The young man bowed at mention of Jim's name, as if he were being introduced.

"Certainly," he gravely agreed. "Certainly, since he is your husband.—But you must not miss my country, dear lady, as so many foolish tourists miss it. It is the Tyrol, my fathers' country: the Austrian Tyrol. There is scenery—the most beautiful scenery in all the world: superb, majestic. You love scenery? Please."

Muriel gave a surprised assent.

"Then do not neglect the Tyrol. They call it the Austrian Tyrol, but it is really the only real Tyrol. Come to Innsbruck by the way of Zurich. That will bring you along the Waldersee, and so, too, you pass Castle Lichtenstein and come across the border at just beyond the ruins of Gräphang. You will see genuine mountains then, gigantic, snow-capped, with forests as dense as—as what you call a hairbrush—black, impenetrable. To the very tops of some the train climbs; it trembles over abysses. You look from the window of it down—down—down, a thousand feet, fifteen hundred, into valleys exquisite, with pink farmhouses or grey in them, the roofs weighted with large stones, the sides painted with crucifixes, or ornamented statues of the Blessed Virgin."

He loved his country and he made it vivid to her. He rambled on and on. Muriel became a more and more fascinated listener. It was not until two hours later that she thought, with a guilty start, of Jim.

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She excused herself hastily and, leaving the Austrian bowing by the rail, ran to the close stateroom and her husband.

He was awake, but still sick.

"Don't bother about me," muttered Stainton as she entered—"and *please* don't bang the door!"

She considered him compassionately. His hair fell in disorder over his haggard face; his cheeks were faintly green.

"Can't I do something for you?" she asked, stepping forward.

Stainton failed in a smile, but feebly motioned her away.

"I am afraid not," said he—"unless you stop the ship. All I need is a little rest. You had better go back on deck. Really."

Muriel delayed.

"A man spoke to me on deck," she breathlessly confessed. "An Austrian diplomat, I think he is. My rug blew, and he rearranged it. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" asked Stinton. "Certainly not.—How this boat pitches!—Talk to him, by all means. These things are common on shipboard, I believe."

Muriel was reassured. She returned to the deck, but von Klausen was not there, and she did not see him again until evening.

Then, though she still dutifully wished that Jim were with her, she found her appetite better than ever. She ventured upon a lonely cocktail. She ate some Blue Points. Captain von Klausen sent to her table, with his card, a pint of champagne, and she ordered potage Mogador, duckling balls with turnips, cèpes Provençals, sacher tart, and ice cream.

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When she reached the promenade-deck, von Klausen was already there. He had dined in evening clothes, but these were now hidden by the light rain-coat that swathed his lithe young figure from neck to heels. Muriel observed that its shoulders fitted to the shoulders of the wearer and had none of the deceptiveness of the padded shoulders to which she was once familiar in American coats.

"Have you seen the phosphorus?" he asked, as she met him at the rail. His lifted cap showed his wind-tossed blond hair, and his ruddy face gleamed with salt spray.

Muriel admitted her ignorance of phosphorus.

"But," said von Klausen, "that is one of the sights of the voyage, and I have not often on the Atlantic seen it finer than it is to-night."

He took her forward, by the starboard rail, under the bridge. Behind them were the closely curtained windows of the writing-room, forward was, only ten feet below them, the now emptied deck reserved for the third-class passengers, and beyond that, higher, rose and fell, rhythmically, the keen, dark prow. They were quite alone.

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"Look there!" said von Klausen.

He pointed over the rail to where the inky surface of the sea was broken by the speed of the *Friedrich Barbarossa's* passage, bursting into boiling, hissing, angry patches of bright whiteness.

Timidly Muriel extended her head.

"Do you see it?" asked von Klausen. He stood close beside her.

"I see the waves," said Muriel, "and the white foam."

"But the phosphorus—you do not see that? There—and there!"

She shook her head.

"Look though," said he. "You do not look in just the correct direction. Please. Ahead, to the left. No; away a little from the ship—a little; not too much—where we have hit the water and the water recedes from us. It is beautiful—beautiful! See!"

The great boat rose on a sudden wave. Von Klausen gripped the rail with one slim hand; the other, its arm around her waist, he placed about her farther arm.

"Now!" he said, and, letting go of the rail, pointed.

Her eyes followed his finger, and there, shining green and yellow, now clear, now opalescent, from burning cores to nebulous edges, she saw what seemed to be live stars smouldering and flaming in the hearts of the waves.

"I see," she said. "It is beautiful—beautiful!"

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She was, she suddenly realised, but repeating his own phrase. Why should she not? The phrase was commonplace enough; besides, the phosphorus *was* beautiful.

Then she became conscious of his arm about her, became conscious that this arm about her had not been unpleasant; was indignant with him, silently, and indignant with herself; made certain, in her own mind, that he had put his arm around her waist only that he might protect her—and thus soon left him and went to bed without waking Jim.

She opened her eyes after an unquiet night, to find that Stinton was somewhat improved, though too mindful of his experience of the preceding day to trust himself on deck.

"I'll wait," he decided, "till to-morrow or this evening. Yes, I think I shall manage it this evening. I'm really in good shape, but I must have eaten something that didn't agree with me. You go up, Muriel. If you see that Austrian fellow, don't forget to give him my compliments and tell him I'll probably have the pleasure of meeting him this evening. What did you say he was?"

"His name," said Muriel, "is von Klausen." She hated herself for her unreasonable disinclination

to mention the Captain.

"H'm—a diplomat, did you say?"

"Something of the sort."

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"As old as most diplomats then, I suppose?"

"No," said Muriel; "he's—he's rather young."

The ship began to descend a lofty wave, and Stainton lay back in his berth. His face, with its full day's growth of beard, looked grey.

"All right," he said. "Run along, dear—and look in about noon."

Muriel obeyed him. Their chairs were well forward, and when she reached them she saw von Klausen again seated in that which bore Stainton's card.

He rose at sight of her. No motion of the boat seemed ever to affect him to awkwardness.

"Your husband," he asked, bareheaded and erect while she seated herself; "he is, I trust, better?"

"He hasn't really been sick," she asseverated with what she knew, as she said it, to be wholly unnecessary emphasis.

The young Austrian performed one of his ceremonious obeisances.

"Then I shall be so pleased, so honoured, this evening to be presented to him, and I so deeply regret his having been ill. It is not good, this ocean, for the elderly."

Muriel's cheeks warmed.

"Why do you call him that?" she demanded. "I told you yesterday that he was—that he was almost young. Why do you call him elderly?"

"Forgive." Von Klausen's wide gesture expressed his regret for this error. "I had forgotten entirely. It is too bad of me to forget entirely."

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"Oh," laughed Muriel, for she was already condemning her annoyance as childishness, "it doesn't matter, because it is so absurd. Only, what gave you such an impression?"

"Please?"

"The impression that he was elderly: what gave you that?"

Von Klausen manifestly hesitated.

"I do not know," he said. "I thought that—I thought that, before we sailed, on the deck here I had seen him with you. You and two American gentlemen I thought I saw: one young and stout. I thought the gentleman young and stout went ashore. Perhaps not. Perhaps it was the other that went ashore. Perhaps that was your father."

There was a moment's silence. Muriel looked intently at the ragged horizon.

"The stout man was Mr. Holt," she said at last. "He is a friend of mine—of ours."

"Ah?" said von Klausen, disinterestedly polite.

"My husband," said Muriel, "is *not* elderly."

"I ask his pardon," said von Klausen. He produced his bow again. He remained quite at his ease, but his manner implied a courteous wonder at any person's shame of his years. "He is then——"

"He is not so much over forty," lied Muriel, without the remotest idea why she should be thus untruthfully communicative.

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Von Klausen ever so slightly turned his head away. She was immediately sure that he did it to conceal a smile.

"That is not old," she hotly contended. She made up her mind now that she did not like this graceful young foreigner. "And Jim is not so old as his age," she continued—"not nearly. He has lived half his life in our Great West, and he is as strong as a lion—and as brave."

She felt the folly of her remark as she made it, but von Klausen gave no sign of sharing that feeling. He settled himself comfortably in Jim's chair. She saw that his face was wholly innocent, his eyes only politely eager.

"Tell me of him, please," he said. "I have heard of your brave Westerners, as you call them, in your United States. I met, once in Washington, a Senator from Texas, but he did not seem to me quite—quite——Pray tell me of your husband, dear lady."

She was amazed to find that, offhand, she could not do this. She started twice and twice stopped, wondering what, after all, there was to say. Then, with a vigorous concentration, she laid hold of all that her aunt and uncle had told her of her husband, all that Holt was authority for, all that the Sunday supplement of the newspapers had printed. She narrated how he had rescued the innocent runaway from the lynching party at Grand Joining, how he had saved the lives of his

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camp mates during the spotted fever epidemic at Sunnyside; she told of the shooting in Alaska, the filibustering expedition, of Jim's slaying with a knife the grizzly bear that was about to strip Holt's flesh from his bones; she gave in detail the story of Jim's descent into the shaft of the "Better Days" mine, and what she had not learned she supplied to the history of the train robbers on the Rio Grande. It was all deliberate boasting, and when she ended, she felt a little ashamed.

Von Klausen, however, was visibly affected.

"He is a man to admire, your husband," said the Austrian. "Strength and bravery, bravery and strength: these, dear lady, are the two things that men envy and women love, all the world over. I wish"—his young smile grew crooked—"I wish I had them."

Muriel's red lips parted in surprise:

"But you are a soldier?"

"What of that?" shrugged von Klausen.

"Oh, but you are brave!" She was sure of it.

"How do you know?" he asked—"how do I?"

"And you—you *look* strong," she continued. Her black eyes passed involuntarily over his slim, well-proportioned figure. "Anybody can see that you must be strong."

"If I correctly recall my sight of your good husband," said the captain, "he could break me in two pieces across his knee." [Pg 152]

She inwardly acknowledged this possibility, but she did not like to bear her new friend belittle himself.

"That's only because Jim is *very* strong," she explained.

"Perhaps," said von Klausen, "yet that was not the only kind of strength I bore in my mind, dear lady. I thought of the strength—of moral strength, strength of purpose—whether the purpose is for the good or the bad—which is two-thirds of bravery."

"And haven't you that?"

It might have been because he was altogether so new to her that the question came readily. There seemed then nothing strange in the discussion of these intimate topics.

"Who knows?" said von Klausen, quietly. "I have not yet been tried. Perhaps, should I love something or somebody, I should acquire these things." His tone lacked offence because it perfectly achieved the impersonal note. "They would come to me then, for I should love that cause or person better than my own life or my own welfare. I do not know. I have not been tried. I know only that, without the cause or the person, I have not real strength; I have not real courage. I have fought my duel; I have faced death—but I know there are forms of it that I fear. I am at least brave enough to admit that I am sometimes afraid. For the rest, I am not the type of man that women love: I need to be cared for, to be thought about, to be helped in the hundred foolish little ways—and women love men who do not take these things, but who give them." [Pg 153]

His low voice, his simplicity, and most of all his childish manner, touched her.

"I think," she said, "that you are not fair to women."

Von Klausen pointed out across the rail.

"Look there!" said he.

A two-masted fishing boat, storm driven from the Banks to sea, swung within three or four hundred yards of them. She could see its dripping gunwale contending with the waves, the oil-skinned sailors tottering upon its deck.

"Now look there!" said von Klausen.

This time he pointed ahead, and ahead she saw, just beyond the charging prow of the imperious *Friedrich*, what seemed to be a thick grey curtain. It reached to the heavens and, as the liner approached it, opened like three walls: one before the prow, the other two on either side. It had all the palpability of heavy cloth.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Fog," said von Klausen, and in a moment, with the great siren of the boat shaking their very hearts, it had descended upon them.

The walls fastened. The curtains enveloped them. The thick, tangible, breath-tightening stuff wrapped them in a kind of cocoon. All the clouds of the sky seemed to have fallen. Muriel could scarcely distinguish the features of the young fellow beside her. And always, reverberating and portentous, the siren howled overhead. [Pg 154]

"The boat!" she called into von Klausen's ear. "Isn't it odd? Only a minute ago it was there. Then I saw only its masts. Now I can't see it at all."

He called his answer.

"Once in the Bosphorus—like this—fog. I was on the prow—an express boat. We brought up a little, low ship—crowded with pilgrims. Fog—shut out—the crash—I could look down and see—faces upturned, calling. I could *see* them calling—could not hear. I am afraid—I am terribly afraid—of fogs."

She heard his voice break. She caught a glimpse of his face—the face of a frightened child. She felt him trembling as their shoulders touched: this soldier who had fought his duel and would not, she knew, fear the trial of battle. She was not afraid. Instinctively, she reached out toward him, to help, to comfort.

When the fog lifted as suddenly as it had fallen, the little fisherman was riding the waves safely and almost gaily far astern. The *Friedrich* sped unconcernedly on.

"There was no real danger, I am sure," von Klausen was saying; "these Germans I do not like, but they are good sailors—too good to hurt a smaller boat." [Pg 155]

Then Muriel discovered that she had been holding his hand.

"I think," she said, "that I had better go and look after Mr. Stainton."

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## X

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### "UNWILLING WAR"

Stainton recovered. Only someone in a fundamentally bad condition could long remain ill aboard this sea-express in the weather that now befell, and Jim's condition was good. Consequently, within another twenty-four hours he was wholly himself again and wholly able to enjoy the rest of the voyage.

Muriel, meanwhile, had not told him of her last conversation with von Klausen and of its termination. She convinced herself that she had taken the young man's hand merely to calm his fears; that she had been unconscious of the action until the fog had lifted; that von Klausen understood this, and that, moreover, the whole episode had endured for but a small fraction of time. She could not, in the circumstances, tell Jim the truth. The present was, indeed, one of those instances that hamper the plain practice of what are accepted in theory as the simple virtues; it was a case where the telling of the truth would be the conveyance of a falsehood. If she had said: "I reached out and took this man's hand and held it while we were passing through a brief curtain of fog," Stainton, she made certain, would have supposed that she was herself afraid in the fog or that she wished to touch von Klausen's hand for the sake of the action itself. Now, she argued, either of these suppositions would be erroneous. The only way in which to give the true value to what she had done would be to repeat what the Austrian had told her of his personal terrors, and that, obviously, would have been a breach of confidence. [Pg 157]

Nevertheless, she thought for some time before she hit upon this satisfactory train of logic. She did not, indeed, hit upon it until the succeeding morning. She had not forgotten what she felt on the night when Jim told her that he loved her. She had felt then that she must always be honest with this honest man concerning herself, and she meant, even yet, to be loyal to that decision; but she had now, as one has said, detected for the first time the fundamental paradox of our moral system: that, whereas the code of life is simple, life itself is complex; that the real world forever presents difficulties involving the ideal law in a cobweb of contradictions; that the best of human beings can but rarely do an imperative right to one individual without thereby doing a patent wrong to another; that truth at its highest is relative and approximate and that, in short, the moral laws are, for those who accept them, nothing more than a standard of perfection toward which their subjects can but approach and to which reality is hourly enforcing exceptions.

Learn her lesson, Muriel, however, at last did. It came to her in the morning after she had wakened from a refreshing, though tardy, sleep, rocked by the motion of the ship, which somehow miraculously cleared her mental vision. She lay still, repeating it, while Stainton, as she saw through her half-opened lids, got up, laboriously shaved, and put on his clothes. She knew that he must think her asleep, and she was much too preoccupied with the solution of her problem voluntarily to disabuse him of this belief. [Pg 158]

But Stainton was mindful of the displeasure that he had encountered on the morning in Aiken when he went downstairs without her. He bent over her in her berth and kissed her.

"Are you going to get up, now?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"You go. Don't mind me," she drowsily murmured. "I don't mind."

"Sure not?"

"Not this once. Go on, dear. I'll be along presently."

She was left alone. She rose and went to the mirror in the wardrobe door. She drew back the

curtain from the port-hole and let in the morning light. She examined, with anxious care, her face. She looked with equal care at her body. By a tacit understanding, she and Jim avoided all direct mention of her condition, he because he feared a recurrence of her hysterical revolt, she because she had fallen upon one of those futile moods in which we feel that to speak of an approaching catastrophe is to hasten it; but twice a day, when she could do it unobserved, she sought, in silent terror, for the tokens that could not possibly so soon be seen.

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Relieved for the moment, she returned to bed and another nap. That accomplished, she dressed slowly, made her way to the saloon, and breakfasted alone. She began to eat with the mighty appetite that had directed her at her previous meals since leaving New York, but this morning there occurred to her a possible explanation of her hunger that made her leave the table with half its dishes untouched. She climbed the promenade-deck and there saw Stainton and von Klausen walking arm-in-arm.

The two men were in sharp contrast. The young Austrian, lithe, easy, an experienced voyager, trod the deck as he would have trod any other floor; his cheeks glowed and his blue eyes sparkled with health and the zest of life. Not so his companion. Stainton, although he bulked large and sturdy beside von Klausen, still showed some of the effects of his sickness: his face was drawn and grey, his glance dull, and he lurched with every roll of the ship.

Muriel was conscious of a distinctly unpleasant sensation. She felt that it was a little ridiculous of Jim thus publicly to exhibit his unfitness for sea-travel. She resented this juxtaposition on its own merits. The next instant, moreover, she was annoyed by her husband because he had not let her have the pleasure of presenting to him this ship-companion that, after all, was hers by right of discovery. Nor was that all: she felt no small degree of bitterness against von Klausen at the assumption that it might have been he who sought this acquaintanceship. Finally, she was disquieted by she knew not what: by, in reality, the fact that her husband, though she would not admit it, looked pale and old beside a man that looked uncommonly ruddy and young. She recalled with a blush what she had said to the captain of her husband's age, what the Austrian had said to her upon the same subject; she recalled his conjecture that he had seen her with her "father." She wondered now if von Klausen would have the impudence to offer to Jim in her presence an apology for his stupid mistake.

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Von Klausen, as the event showed, had no impudence at all. Both he and Stainton greeted her heartily, the latter with a trifle more solicitude for her health than she thought seemly; and the Austrian was soon installed in a chair beside Stainton's.

"But do I not trespass?" inquired von Klausen with his sweeping inclination.

"On us?" said Jim. "Certainly not. Mighty glad to have you, I'm sure. You see, you have been extremely good to my wife while I was laid up."

Von Klausen looked at the name on the chair-back:

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"Yet this person to whom the chair belongs?"

"Oh," Muriel encouraged him, in moral reaction against her recent annoyance, "that person hasn't been on deck once since we sailed."

Whereupon they all sat down, and the two men fell to talking while the band played in the sunlight and the blue-coated stewards handed about their trays. They talked, the American and the Austrian, of the differences between the United States and Austria, as noted by them, of money markets and percentages, of international law and treaties and standing armies and a host of other things that Muriel did not understand and did not care to understand. And she did not like it.

As the voyage progressed, Stainton and von Klausen became more and more friendly, and Muriel more and more restless, she could not tell why. Her husband had passed his entire manhood among men and had acquired, though he did not know it, the taste for the discussion of what, because of the inferior grade of education that we grant to women, we magnificently call manly topics. These he had not enjoyed since his wedding-day, and now he was hungry for them. He did not neglect Muriel, and von Klausen often made efforts to bring her into their conversations, but her mind had never been trained to these subjects and was, moreover, now filled with a more intimate concern. For an hour she would sit beside Jim and listen to him with some admiration, but less comprehension of his technical terms, and then for fifteen minutes she would leave the pair and walk the deck alone.

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"To me it seems," von Klausen was one day saying, "that the great danger in your country is the disintegration of the unit of society, the break-up of the home."

"Oh," said Stainton, "you're referring to our divorce laws?"

The captain nodded.

"Well, how are they in your country?" asked Jim.

"In Austria the code of 1811 is still in force, and under it there are divorces allowed for violence, cruelty, desertion, incompatibility, and adultery. Adultery is a crime and is punishable by five years' imprisonment."

"That sounds as if your code is pretty broad, too," remarked Stainton.

"Ah, but it is applicable only to persons that are not Catholics, and Austria is a Catholic country."

"I see. And what do the Catholics do?"

"They remain married."

"Always?"

"The law allows them the remedy of judicial separation."

Stainton was smoking a cigar. He puffed at it thoughtfully.

"Judicial separation," he finally said, "has always struck me as begging the question. It denies liberty and yet winks at license. A good marriage ought to be guarded and a bad one broken." [Pg 163]

"That," replied von Klausen, "is the American view."

"Not at all. We have all sorts of views—and there is one great trouble. You can get a divorce for nothing in Nevada, and you can't get it for anything in South Carolina. The South Carolina result is that they have had to pass a law there removing illegitimacy as a bar to succession."

"Nevertheless," said von Klausen, "except for Japan, there are more divorces in the United States than in any other country in the world. I was told, while I was in Washington, that the American statistics were—they showed seventy-nine divorces to every hundred thousand of your population. Your divorces increase more rapidly than your population; they increase more rapidly than your marriage-rate."

"I don't know about that," said Stainton; "although I believe that I have seen some such figures given somewhere, but I am clear on one point: the man that treats his wife badly ought not to be allowed the chance to have a wife any longer." He looked at Muriel, seated at his side; he smiled and patted her hand as it lay on the arm of her chair. "Don't you think so, dear?" he asked.

Muriel smiled in answer. [Pg 164]

"Of course I do," said she. "Don't you, Captain von Klausen?"

The Austrian's face remained serious.

"I am of the religion of my country," he said.

"Eh?" said Stainton. "Oh, I beg your pardon."

"Not at all. Please." Von Klausen waived religious immunity. "I govern myself one way, but I do not object to hear the reasons why other people should choose other ways. Your way—your American way of divorce—is one of the peculiarities of your great nation, and so I studied it much while I lived there. If you permit, sir, to say it: the figures do not well bear out the boast that the American husband is the best husband. So, Mrs. Stainton?"

"But he is, just the same," protested Muriel.

"What do the figures show?" asked Jim.

"That two divorces are granted to wives to every one granted husbands."

"With all the respect to the best wife in the world," chuckled Stainton, as he again patted Muriel's hand, "that is largely due to the fact that the average American is so good a husband that, innocent as he may be, he pretends to be the guilty party."

Von Klausen's eyes twinkled shrewdly.

"Is it not a little," he enquired, "because the disgrace of being judged a guilty husband is easier to bear than the ridicule that is involved in being unable to keep the love of one's wife?" [Pg 165]

"Perhaps it is; perhaps it is," admitted Stainton. "But your figures do not prove anything against us as husbands, Captain. The only reason that similar figures don't show the men of other countries to be worse husbands than we are—if, indeed, they don't show it—is that the laws of other countries simply do not permit such easy divorce."

"Then what of your population?" asked the Austrian, reverting to his previous line of attack. "It declines as divorce rises in your country."

Muriel rose abruptly.

"I think I shall take a little walk," she said.

Stainton half-rose. Von Klausen sprang to his feet.

"Permit me——" began the Captain.

"No, no," said Muriel; "please sit still, both of you."

"But, my dear——" said Stainton.

"I don't want to interrupt your talk," the girl said. "Finish that and then join me, Jim."

"In ten minutes, then," said Stainton.

The men resumed their chairs. They looked after her strong young body as, the wind blowing her skirt about her, she walked away.

"At all events," said Stainton heartily, "there goes the best American wife."

Von Klausen had grown accustomed to the open domesticity of Americans. He did not smile.

"She is a charming lady," he agreed. He looked out to sea. "And a beautiful." After a moment he added: "Do you object, sir, if I say that it is delightful, the manner in which the black hair gathers over her forehead and that in which she carries her gracious head?"

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"Object, Captain? I say you're quite right. I'm a lucky man. Have you ever seen more lovely eyes?"

Von Klausen was still looking out to sea.

"In all the world I have seen but one pair that was their equal," he answered.

Stainton pulled at his cigar.

"You were saying,"—he returned to their previous subject—"that the American birth-rate declined as divorce grew. Do you think the increase of the one causes the decrease of the other?"

"I admit that the rate falls in times of commercial depression."

"Of course: divorce and birth are both expensive. If you would look into the matter a little closer, Captain, I think you would find that the growth of child labour and the cost of living have about as much to do with the fall in the birth-rate as anything else. Some of our divorces are granted to foreigners that come to America because they can't get easy divorces in their native lands. Most are given for desertion, which generally means that they are arranged by mutual consent. Nearly as many result from charges of 'cruelty,' which is as often as not the man's habit of whistling in the house when his wife has a headache—'constructive cruelty' we call it, although 'concocted cruelty' would be a better term. Adultery comes only next, I am told, and then neglect to provide, and drunkenness. The other causes are all lower in the list. So you see that when our divorces are not really the result of a quiet agreement between the husband and wife—and every judge that signs a decree knows in his heart that nine-tenths are that—they are the result of conduct which, for anybody who does not consider marriage a sacrament, abundantly justifies the action."

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The talk shifted to Wall Street and continued for half an hour.

"Von Klausen has some antiquated ideas," remarked Stainton to Muriel as they were going to bed that night; "but he seems to be a pretty good sort of man. I like him."

Muriel was standing before the mirror, brushing the blue-black hair that fell nearly to her knees.

"Do you?" she asked, with no show of interest.

"Yes, he has good stuff in him. Of course, he's a mere boy, but he has good stuff in him, I'm sure."

"I don't see why you call him a boy," said Muriel,

"Why? Why, because he *is* a boy, my dear."

"I'm sure you seem just as young as he is."

Stainton laughed and kissed her.

"Little Loyalty!"

"I don't care," said Muriel, "I don't like him."

"You don't? Why, I thought——"

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"I did like him at first, but I don't any more."

"Why not? You ought to. He admires you tremendously."

"Does he? How do you know?"

"By what he says. He told me to-day that he had never seen but one pair of eyes equal to yours."

"Only one? That was nice of him, I'm sure. What else did he say?"

"He said—oh, lots of things. He said you had beautiful hair and that it somehow grew in curves from your forehead, and I said that he was quite right."

"Is that all?"

"All I can remember. How much do you want, anyhow?"

"Well, I don't like him."

"But why not?"

"I don't know. I suppose because you like him too well. I hardly see you any more."

Stainton assured his wife that no man or woman in the world was worth her little finger. He clambered into the upper berth and watched her for some time as her bared arm rose and fell,

wielding the brush. At last the sight of that regular motion, added to the gentle rocking of the ship, closed his eyes. He had had a full day and was tired. He was soundly asleep when he was wakened by her embrace.

She was standing on the ladder and pressing his face to hers.

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"Love me!" she was whispering. "O, Jim, love me!"

Stainton was still half-asleep,

"I do love you, Muriel," he said.

"Yes, but—*Love* me, Jim!" she whispered.

She clutched him suddenly.

"Ouch, my hair!" said Stainton. "You're pulling my hair!"

"Oh!" Muriel's tone was all self-reproach. "I'm sorry. Did I hurt you, dear?"

"No," he smiled. "No. There, there!" He patted her head. "It's all right. Good-night, dearest."

"Good-night?" There was a question in the words as she repeated them, but she retreated, albeit slowly, down the ladder. "Good-night, Jim."

"Good-night, dear," he responded cheerily, "and—I do love you, you know."

She answered from below:

"Yes, Jim."

"You do know it, don't you, dear heart?"

"Yes, Jim."

He heard her draw the bedclothes about her. When he awoke in the morning, she slept, but he would not breakfast until she was ready to breakfast with him, and so he sat, hungry, and waited for the hour that she devoted to her toilette. Then they went to the saloon, and afterwards to the deck, together.

Neither on that day nor on the day following was Muriel alone with von Klausen. Indeed, she was not alone with him again until they touched, at ten o'clock of a bright morning, at Plymouth, where the grateful green and yellow hills rose from the blue water, and the town nestled in a long white belt behind a chain of grim, grey men-of-war. The tender had stood by, and, now that some of the high stacks of mail-bags, which had been filling the stern decks since dawn, were transferred, an endless procession of slouching porters out of uniform carried, one brick to each man for each trip, large bricks of silver down the gangways and deposited them in piles of five, well forward on the tender. Jim had gone to the writing-room to scribble a note that might catch a fast boat from England to his agent at the mine, and Muriel was left beside the rail to talk with the Austrian.

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"It has been a delightful voyage, has it not?" he asked, in that precise English to which she had now grown accustomed.

"I dare say," answered Muriel. "I don't know. You forget that I have had no others with which to compare it."

"But you have not been bored?"

"No."

"It has surely been pleasant, for I have by it had the opportunity to meet you and your brave husband."

"My husband, I know, would say as much of it because he has met you."

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The Austrian bowed.

"Nor have I failed," he said, "to tell him how much the entire company aboard seem to admire his charming wife."

Muriel was resting her elbows on the rail; her glance was fixed upon the distant town.

"He told me," she responded, "that you thought my eyes about the second best within your experience. I hope your experience has been wide."

Von Klausen flushed.

"My experience," he said, gravely, "has, I regret to tell you, been that of most young men."

"Oh!" said Muriel. Her tone showed dislike of all that this implied, but she recalled that Jim had had no such experiences as those to which von Klausen plainly referred, and she suddenly felt, somehow, that this difference between the men did not altogether advance Stainton.

"Nevertheless, dear lady," the Austrian was going on, "the eyes that I thought as beautiful as yours—I did not say more beautiful—were eyes that have long since been shut."

Muriel was now more piqued than before. Had the man been comparing her to a dead fiancée to whom he, living, remained faithful?

"Were they Austrian eyes?" she asked, her own eyes full of obtrusive indifference.

"No; they were Italian. Had you come to Europe three years ago, you would have seen them when you went to the Louvre. They were the eyes that have been given to the Mona Lisa." [Pg 172]

Muriel and he were standing apart from the crowd of passengers that watched the unloading of the silver. The girl turned to her companion. Her glance was interested enough now, and she saw at once that his was serious.

"There is something that I have been wanting to tell you," she began, before she was well aware that she spoke—"something that I don't know exactly how to say, or whether I ought to say it at all."

Von Klausen was openly concerned.

"If you are in doubt," he replied, "perhaps it would be better if you first thought more about it."

But his opposition, though totally the reverse to what she had expected, clinched her resolve.

"No," she said. "I ought to tell you about it. Now that I have started I know I ought. It's—it's about that time in the fog."

Von Klausen's colour mounted. Then, politely, he pretended to forget the incident.

"Yes, don't you remember? You must remember."

"I remember. It was a very sudden fog."

"Well," she said, "it was about what happened then. I must speak to you—I must explain about that." She was holding tightly to the rail. [Pg 173]

Von Klausen saw her wrists tremble. He made little of the subject.

"When you were frightened, and I took your hand to reassure you? Dear lady, I trust that you have not supposed that I acted on my presumption—"

"You're kind to put it that way," she interrupted. "You're generous. But I want to be honest. I have to be honest, because I want you to understand—because you must understand—just why I behaved as I did, and you wouldn't understand—you couldn't—if I weren't honest with you. Captain von Klausen, you didn't take my hand, and you know it. I took yours."

He raised the disputed hand; he raised it in protest.

"Mrs. Stainton, I assure you that it was I who—"

"No, it wasn't. And I wasn't frightened by the fog, either. You must remember that, from the way I spoke; I showed I didn't even realise what a fog means at sea. So how could I be afraid of it? You did know and you had just said that you were afraid of fogs. I took your hand. I did it before I thought—"

"Yes, yes, dear Mrs. Stainton"—he was painfully anxious to end all this—"before you thought. It was nothing but a kindly—"

"Before I thought," she pursued, determinedly, her dark eyes steady on his. "You had told me of that awful experience of yours in the Bosphorus and of the effect it had on you. No wonder it did have such an effect. I am not blaming you for that. Only, I saw that you needed help and comfort. I was sorry for you. That was all: I was just sorry. I did it without thinking. I didn't know I had done it at all till it was all over. You see," she concluded, "I just couldn't, now, bear to have you misunderstand." [Pg 174]

Carefully analysed, it might seem a contradictory explanation, but it was no sooner free of her lips than she felt that her soul was free of this thing which she had sought to explain.

Von Klausen was quite as much relieved as Muriel. He accepted it as she wished him to accept it.

"Never for a moment did I misunderstand," said he.

"Then," added Muriel, "you will understand why I haven't mentioned it to my husband—"

"Your husband?" The Austrian was all amazement. "Why should you?"

"Because," said Muriel, compressing her full lips and assuming her full height, "I always tell Jim everything."

If the shadow of a smile passed beneath his military moustache, she could not be sure of it.

"Everything?" said he. "But you have said that this was nothing."

"Exactly, and—don't you see?—that is one of the reasons why I haven't told it. You will—you will please not refer to it to him, Captain von Klausen, because—"

"Refer to it?" Von Klausen squared his shoulders. "To him? Never!" [Pg 175]

His assertion was vehement.

"There is no reason why you shouldn't," Muriel replied; "only, as I say, I haven't told him, and the only real reason that I didn't tell him was because to do so I should have to tell him, too, that you had been afraid; and that isn't my secret: it's yours."

The Austrian's boyish face was now very grave.

"I thank you," he said. "For your thought of me I thank you, and the more I thank you because, by keeping my secret, you made it *ours*."

"Oh, but I don't mean——" said Muriel.

She did not finish, for she saw Stainton come from the writing-room and stride rapidly toward them. He had written his letter and despatched it.

Although the three stood shoulder to shoulder in the customs-shed at Cherbourg later in the day and occupied the same first-class compartment in the fast express through the rolling Norman country to Paris, Muriel and von Klausen were not then given an opportunity to conclude their conversation. The Austrian bade the Staintons good-bye in the swirl of porters and chauffeurs at the Gare St. Lazare, and Muriel took it for granted that the interruption must be final.

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## XI

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### DR. BOUSSINGAULT

Muriel awoke in their apartments at the Chatham the next morning to find herself decidedly out of sorts. Well as she had borne the voyage, she no sooner put her feet from her one of the two little canopied beds to the floor than she felt again the motion of the ship, and there was a return of the nausea that she attributed to the trouble which silently weighed upon her. She crawled back to the bed.

"I can't get up," she said.

Stainton was worried. He fluttered about her. He wanted to ring for servants to bring half-a-dozen things that Muriel would not accept. He wanted the smallest details of her symptoms. He wanted to send for a doctor.

"Go away," Muriel pleaded. "Please go away."

"But, dearie——"

"I wish I were back in New York."

Stainton, though he now feared the sea, was ready to undertake the return trip on the morrow.

"No, no," moaned Muriel. "Of course, now we are here, we must see things. But I won't have a doctor, Jim. Can't you see how it is with me? I shall be all right in an hour."

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"All right, dearie; all right. I shall sit here by you."

"Please don't. I'm horrid when I'm sick."

"Not to me," said Jim.

"But I am. I look so horrid."

"I don't see it."

"Oh, you're good, Jim. But I want to be alone, just as you did when you were seasick. Go into the sitting-room. Please. I'll call you if I need you."

He went into their sitting-room, a room that shone with green and gilt, and looked out, across a narrow street, at the grey houses of uniform height and listened to the shrill street-sounds of Paris. He was lonely.

Somebody knocked at the door opening on the hall.

"Come in," he called. "I mean: *entrez!*"

A servant advanced, bearing a tray.

Jim saw that there was a card on the tray. He took it up and read the name of Paul Achille Boussingault. He did not remember ever having heard the name.

"*Pour moi?*" asked Jim.

"Yes, sir," said the servant, in a wholly unaccented English.

"Hum," said Jim. "Now I wonder what *he* wants. Very well, show him up."

He hurried to the bedroom.



Muriel did not lift the covers that concealed her face.

"Go away," she said.

"I am going, only, dearie——"

"Go away—*please!*"

Jim re-entered the sitting-room. Was it Bou-sing-go? He had his doubts about that French *in*. If he remembered rightly, it was a kind of *an*, and the *n* ended somewhere in the nose. And who was M. Boussingault, anyhow?

"M. le docteur Boo-sàn-go," announced the servant.

"Wait. How was that?" asked Jim, and then found himself face to face with his visitor.

His visitor was a stocky man, of not more than five feet five or six inches in height, inclined to pugginess. He had a leathery complexion, and the point of his thin Van Dyck beard was in a straight line from the sharper point in which his close-clipped bristling hair ended above his nose. It was black hair, and it retreated precipitately on both sides. He looked at Jim through eyeglasses bearing a gold chain and bound together by a straight bar, which gave the effect of a continuous scowl to his heavy brows. He bowed deeply.

"M. James Stainton?" he enquired.

"Yes," said Jim. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, monsieur. I have the honour to present the compliments of my brother, M. Henri Duperré Boussingault, and to ask that you will be so very good as me to command in the case I can be of any the slightest service to you and madame during your visit to Paris."

Stainton was at a loss.

"Your brother?" said he.

"M. Henri Boussingault," repeated the visitor. "He has to me written from Lyon to attend well to the appearance of your name among the distinguished arrivals in the *Daily Mail*."

The mention of Lyons aided Stainton's memory. He recalled now that the name of Henri Boussingault had appeared among those of the Lyonnaise syndicate that was interested in the purchase of the mine.

"Oh, yes," he said, and his broad teeth showed in a smile. "To be sure. This is very kind of you. Won't you sit down?"

Paul Achille Boussingault arranged his coat-tails and sat down with a grunt that apparently always accompanied this action on his part. His knees were far apart, and his feet scarcely touched the parquet floor. He was dressed completely in black, with the ribbon of an order fastened in the lapel of his frock-coat. His collar was low and round and upright, its junction with the shirt concealed by a small, prim black tie.

Stainton took a chair opposite him.

"Won't you have a cigar?" he asked.

"But thanks," said the visitor. "A cigarette only, if you do not object?" He produced a yellow packet of *Marylands*, and offered it to Jim.

"Thank you," said Stainton, lighting the cigarette. He did not like it, because, being an American, he did not care for American tobacco; but he tried to appear to like it. He wondered what he should talk about. "I shall be glad to make use of your kind offer."

"You will honour me," said the Frenchman.

"Um. And are you, too, interested in mining investments?"

The visitor dismissed mines and mining to his brother with a wave of his short hand. Stainton noticed that his fingers, though not long, were well shaped and tapering, in contradistinction to the spatulate thumbs, and that he wore a diamond set in a ring of thick gold.

"Those there are the avocation of my brother. I take no part in these affairs of the bourse. You will me forgive if I say, monsieur, that I have no traffic with such abominations of our society modern. I am a man of science."

"A doctor?" asked Jim.

"Of medicine."

For a moment Stainton revolved the idea of taking the visitor to see Muriel, but he divined Muriel's attitude toward such an action and banished the thought. Her indisposition was, of course, but natural and passing.

"What," asked Jim, "ought we to see first in Paris? We are strangers here, you know."

The doctor flung out his short arms. He indulged in an apostrophe to Paris that reminded Stainton of some of the orations he had read as having been delivered in the councils of the First Republic. Boussingault's English was frequently cast in a French mould and sometimes so fused that it was mere alloyage; but he never paused for a word, and he spoke with a fervour that was almost vehemence. There were moments when Jim wondered if the Frenchman suspected him of some slur on Paris and conceived it a duty to defend the city. What Jim must see was, in brief, everything.

Nevertheless, so soon as the apostrophe ended, Boussingault appeared to forget all about it. His sharp eyes travelled over the hotel sitting-room, and his mind occupied itself therewith as devotedly as it had just been giving itself to the Gallic metropolis.

"Ah, you Americans," he sighed; "how you love the luxury!"

"Perhaps we do," said Jim, recalling certain negotiations that he had conducted at the hotel's *bureau*; "but if the price of these rooms is a criterion, you French make us pay well for it."

Dr. Boussingault's glance journeyed to the partly open doors of the bathroom, displaying a tiled whiteness.

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"And without doubt a bath?" he enquired.

"A bath," nodded Stainton.

"And me"—Boussingault shook his bullet-like head—"I well recall when the water-carts stopped at the corners of the streets too narrow for their progress, and one called from the high window that one wished to buy so much and so much, because one bathed oneself or the servant washed the linen to-day."

He talked for a while, again rhapsodically, of the old city, the city of his youth, and, when he chanced to touch upon its restaurants, Stainton asked him if, that evening or the next, he would dine with Muriel and himself.

"Ah, no," said Boussingault. "It is that madame and you, monsieur, shall dine with me. To-night? To-morrow night?"

Stainton accepted for the following evening.

"And at what spot would you prefer, monsieur?"

"I don't know," said Jim. "I have eaten *sole à la Marguery*. We might catch that in its native waters: we might dine at Marguery's."

"Well," the Frenchman shrugged, "Marguery is not bad. At least the kitchen is tolerable. But you should eat your sole as she swims."

They were not, however, destined to keep the appointment on the day set, for, during that morning came a *petit bleu* from Boussingault, postponing the dinner for a week, and followed by a letter overflowing with fine spencerian regrets to the effect that its writer had been imperatively summoned to Grenoble for consultation in an illness "occurring in a family distinguished."

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"I don't care if we never see him," said Muriel. "I could hear him through the door: he talks too loud."

They consoled themselves and wearied themselves with sightseeing, and often this tried Muriel's nerves. Secretly she still watched for the appearance of signs to indicate her condition and secretly she tightened her stays, long before any signs could appear. She was often sick in the mornings, though with decreasing recurrence, and, when she began to feel relief by the diminution, she became the more despondent upon realisation of its cause. Moreover, even the comfort of *petit déjeuner* in bed did not compensate for those crumbs for which no one could be held responsible.

True to his policy to "let nature take her course," Stainton maintained a firm reticence upon the subject uppermost in the minds of both, but this reticence was applied only to his speech; and his solicitude, his patient but patent care, and his evident anxiety often annoyed her, since they kept her destiny before her and seemed to her apprehensive imagination—what they were far from being—no more than the expressions of a fear that she might make some physical revelation of her state in a public and embarrassing manner.

"You don't think of me!" she one day wept, when he had put her into a *taxi-mètre* to drive a few hundred yards.

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"Muriel," said Stainton, "I think of nothing else."

"No, you don't think of me," she insisted. "You think only of—of *it*. You're worried about me as a mother and not as a wife. You are!"

Stainton protested, grieved to the heart; but she would not hear him.

"It's as if you were a stock-farmer," she said, the tears in her velvety eyes, "and I were only your favorite thoroughbred in foal."

This simile he found revolting. It required all his masculine philosophy satisfactorily to account for her use of it, and, even when that had been applied, he reprimanded her, with kindness, but with decisiveness also. It was some time before she begged his pardon and condemned herself; some time before he soothed her and told her, what she hated to hear, that her words had risen not from herself but from her condition.

They went to Marguery's, when the doctor returned to Paris, rather worn out by their week of sightseeing; but they found the crowded restaurant pleasantly diverting. The chatter of the diners, the scurrying of the waiters, and the gratification of the leather-covered seat from which, across a shining table, they faced Boussingault, quieted them and made them forget for a space the subject that one of them was weary of remembering.

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Then, by some mischance, Stainton hit upon a fatal topic.

"Doctor," he said, "I am sure you can give me some authoritative information on a matter that I have read a little of. I mean the question of the decrease in the French birth-rate and the efforts to stop it and build up not only a larger race but a race of the best stock."

He saw instantly that he had struck the little man's hobby. Dr. Boussingault sat with one thick knee covered by his serviette and thrust into the aisle for the *garçons* to stumble over. His dark eyes, keen and expressive, were shaped like wide almonds and, unobscured by any vestige of lashes, perpetually snapped and twinkled through his glasses in a lively disregard of the phlegmatic indications given by the dark bags beneath them.

"The most healthy sign in France to-day," he said. "Absolutely."

"You mean the effort to increase and better the stock?"

"No. One thousand no's. The success in decreasing it."

"My dear sir——"

The doctor waved his hands. He drank no alcohol, he said; only some wine of the country, red; but of this, heavily diluted by water, he was drinking copiously.

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"Attend, monsieur. I know well, my God, these good people who go to England and have international congresses and, between the dinners given by Her Grace of Dulpuddle and the lawn parties, when one permits them to enter the park of the Castle Cad, indulge in a debauch of scientific verbosity. But yes; I know them! I have been to their meetings and heard one of these savants talk while ten snored. 'Nature, nature!' they cry, and all the time, all the time they forget Nurture. What do I to them say? I, Paul Achille Boussingault?" The doctor struck his heart, and breathed: "*I say one word: 'Environment!'—and they silence themselves.*"

Before this volley Stainton felt dismayed.

"I had always thought," he said, "that this aim was excellent. Their purpose is the improvement of the race."

"Purpose? But yes. Good. But their Nature, she makes only effects. How do they, my God, go to attain it, their purpose? By to make more good the chance now miserable of the oppressed to bring to life some strong sons and some robust daughters? *Jamais!* Rather by to continue the present process of crowding to the grave the class that their class has made unfit, by to encourage breeding—million thunders, yes, among those very oppressors, truly, whose abuse of power already unfits *them!*"

Stainton was a trifle nervous at the fear that the talk would soon turn to subjects of which a young wife is supposed to be ignorant. He glanced at Muriel, but he saw that she was engaged solely with the cut of *canard sauvage* that lay on her plate, and he concluded that since she must some day learn of these things of which the doctor and he were talking, it was as well for her to learn of them from her husband and a physician. Nevertheless, he wavered.

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"I thought, doctor," he said, "that in France they offered money to the poor to increase the population?"

The Frenchman's broad, pale lips smiled. He shrugged.

"Money? My friend, as a man of affairs, you must know that one cannot say 'Money' but that one is asked: "Ow much?" Attend well: In your country and in England these savants—name of God!—want what they call the best; in my country they want what they call the many. Do they this reconcile? I should be well amused to know the way." Dr. Boussingault leaned across the table and tapped Jim's wrist with an impressive forefinger. "In all the world, all, the only people that desire the poor to produce families, they are the *propriétaires* and those lackeys of the *propriétaires*, the generals of the armies. The *propriétaire* wants much workers, and he wants workers so bound by family 'responsibilities'—the Frenchman hissed the s's of this word—"that they dare not revolt; he wants competition for the workers, for she lowers the wage. For the generals, all they want is more men to feed to the monster, War."

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"You must be a Socialist," smiled Stainton.

"Socialist?" thundered the physician. "Never in life! Me, I am I: Boussingault, *médecin!*"

"At any rate," said Stainton, "the world can't very well get along without children, you know."

He was amazed at the doctor's manner: Boussingault would wave his arms and shout his words and then, when he had leaped to silence, relapse into a calm that seemed never to have been dispelled.

Jim regarded the neighboring tables, but no one of the company there paid any attention to the commanding tones of the physician, probably because nearly all the guests of the restaurant were engaged in talk that was quite as violent as that of Paul Achille. Muriel might have been a thousand miles away.

Now the word "children" again loosed the storm.

"Children?" shouted the doctor. "Let us be reasonable! Let us regard with equanimity the children! They ask the poor for the children, these *propriétaires*; but what they would say is servants and *filles de joie* to work for them. They will not pay the man sufficient to make a marriage; they pretend not to like that the women bear children without marriage—and they run about and sob for more babies! *Bien*. In effect, then, what is it that the labourer to them replies? He replies: 'Give me the 'abitable houses, and then I will give you in'abitants—not before.'" [Pg 189]

Dr. Boussingault produced a huge handkerchief, shook it, mopped his sparkling brow, and resumed absolute immobility.

Stainton was now sincerely interested. He had thought somewhat upon these matters and, although he saw as yet no personal relevance in them, he had an intellectual appetite for their discussion.

"As I see it," he said, "none of these people that are trying to improve the breed denies that the poor are in a bad way, but just because the poor are in a bad way, they fail to be the stuff by which the race can be improved. I am now speaking, you understand, of what you, doctor, consider the American and English savants. What they are after is to increase the best, and their best raw material is found in the sons of the well-to-do, because the well-to-do are the intelligent, are the people that do the work of the world."

Boussingault chortled derisively.

"What propelled your ship to France?" he demanded. "An engine, is it not? But the engine, it is necessary that it be fed, and think you that the man who put the coal in that engine was well-to-do? Who grinds your corn, who makes your shoes, who builds your house? Name of God!"

"I am thinking about the directing intelligence, doctor. The improper character tossed into the human pond sinks to its bottom, and the proper character, even if placed at its bottom, rises to the top." [Pg 190]

"So you propose to improve the race, monsieur, by breeding from the thieving millionaire risen to the top of the pond and by letting the Christs sink, as they have always sanken? Do not talk of breeding for ability until you give a chance for to develop the ability that now goes everywhere to waste. Men and women they will mate in spite of you."

"The process would strengthen marriage," said Stainton.

"But yes," replied the Frenchman. "Marriage is of relations the most intimate: they would make it the most public. It was wrong enough, my God, when, after centuries of no attention to marriage, the church quickly assumed of it the control and made of it a public ceremony. It will be more bad when the police assume of it the control and make of it a public scandal."

Muriel raised her great, dark eyes to the doctor and then lowered them to her plate.

Stainton shifted uneasily.

"I do not believe in that sort of thing and never would," he said, "but I am sure that marriage is the best friend of the race's future."

"Not so long as it is directed even as it now is. Not so long as the diseased 'usband may legally force a child on his wife, or the wife-merely-lazy may refuse to bear a child to a healthy 'usband. A wife can divorce a 'usband because he is sterile through not his own fault, but if he is sterile because he wants sterility, she must continue to be his wife. You speak well as if to make people to breed it is necessary but to go to whip them, or trick them, into a wedding. Marriage does not imply parenthood. That relationship is arbitrary." [Pg 191]

This was something more than Jim had counted on. A slow flush mounted to his iron-grey hair. He saw that Muriel attended entirely to her food, and he did not know whether to admire this peace as evidence of her self-control or to wonder how she could hear such things and give no sign of hearing them.

The doctor, however, ran from bad to worse.

"Most of the children in this world are here by accident. They are not wanted, no, because they are too much trouble or too much cost, or they are girls, as the case may be. They are not a tie binding their parents' love by their presence; generally they are a sword to divide it by necessitating economies. What married man, even rich, does not endeavour to limit the number of his little ones, *hein*?" To Jim's horror the doctor broadly winked. "What unmarried man does not endeavour to suppress his little ones altogether? Both will in private joke the one to the other about it, and both fear it should publicly be known. Marriage? Poof! It is the name of a *prix fixe*" [Pg 192]

charged for respectability."

Stainton was not the man to try to evade an issue by an attempt to divert the conversation, and he saw that the doctor was not the man to be diverted. As the waiter brought the coffee ("No cognac, thank you," said Boussingault; "no alcohol") Jim challenged direct.

"You shock me," declared the American, "by what you tell me about children not being wanted. I don't agree with you there. Of course, that is sometimes the case in irregular relations, but I think too well of humanity to believe that, by married parents of any means at all, children are not wanted after they get here."

"None?"

Both men turned: it was Muriel that had spoken. Her face grew scarlet under their look.

The doctor's glance was keen.

"I am of madame's mind," said he, quietly.

Stainton strove to pass the embarrassing interruption.

"Well, doctor," he said, and from the corner of his eye saw with satisfaction that Muriel busied herself with an intricate ice, "I stick to my belief in humanity."

Boussingault flourished his coffee cup and spilled a liberal portion of its contents.

"In what world do you live?" he asked.

"In an eminently sane one," said Stainton.

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"*Bien*; I knew it was not the real world. In your world you know nothing, then, of all the ways, direct and indirect, to make women bear babies they do not want; in it you know nothing of the child unloved and scarcely endured; in it you know nothing of the boy or girl for these reasons, or because the mother hated the price of marriage, afflicted with morbid nerves and will-atrophy. Those who would improve the race must know of these things, but they consider them not. They consider not that there is the motherly-physical inclination combined with physical ability; that degrees of inclination and ability vary. They make one law for all that, by physique only, appear fit. Good, then: the person the best fitted for their plan is she who will not let them send her to the altar as if she had no proper will. Again, suppose you forbid the 'unfit' to marry? You straightway increase not only the number of illegitimate children, but of illegitimate unfit children, for the illegitimate child, in our mad world, has not the whole of a chance. M. Stainton, your savants would raise the race by oppressing the individuals."

Stainton's anxiety was now to end the meal. He felt that matters had gone far enough, and he feared that the topic of discussion had proved a morbid one for a prospective mother. He murmured something about the survival of the fittest.

"The survival of the fittest," roared Boussingault. "My good friend, who is it that is fitted to survive? He who can? The brute? You say"—he had quite placed poor Stainton in the opposition by this time—"you say that you would rather have for parent a robust burglar than a tubercular bishop. Me, Boussingault, I choose the bishop, for it is better to have ill health with money to hire Boussingaults than good health without money to buy food. 'Defectives'! Holy blue! The prize-fighter in New York who murders the little girl is of splendid physique and gives extraordinary care to his body. He is scrupulously clean. He does not smoke, does not even drink red wine. Of the sixteen children of his parents only seven prove, by survival, fitness to survive. He is of them—and he murders the little girl."

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"Well," said Stainton, smiling, "perhaps sixteen is *too* many."

"Tell me why," said the Frenchman. "Our great Massenet is of a family of children"—he swung his arm and dropped his emptied cup—"countless—absolutely countless. Environment, that is what you forget; environment, and inclination and *suitable* physique. What to do? You should change the economic conditions that breed your 'defectives' as a refuse-heap breeds flies, but instead you propose to spend time and money to try to 'segregate' defectives as fast as you manufacture them. 'Segregate' and 'sterilize'? I have yet to hear of one of you sterilising a degenerate child of your own. You produce them not? Often. And you produce the good? Francis Galton left no child at all. I, Boussingault, say to you: breed a Florence Nightingale and an Isaac Newton and bring them up in a city slum and set them to work in a city factory, and their very good breeding will be society's loss. Truly. What you will have will not be a philanthropist and a scientist, but only a more than commonly seductive *fille* and a more than commonly clever thief. You cannot breed a free race until you have given to the possible mothers of it freedom of choice; and you cannot breed a healthy race until you have given to papa and mamma and baby proper food and surroundings—until you have given the man working the full pay for his toil."

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He leaned back in his chair, held his handkerchief before his mouth without concealing it, and began to pick his teeth.

Muriel rose; she was pale. The two men started also to rise.

"Please don't," said Muriel. "I shall be back in a moment."

"Dearest—" began Stainton.

Muriel's answer was one look. She hurried from the room.

"My wife," said Stainton, resuming his seat, "is not very well."

"You desolate me," replied the physician as he grunted his way back into his chair. "But now that madame absents herself for a moment, let me be explicit." [Pg 196]

"Explicit?" said Stainton. "I should have thought—Why, you have been talking as if the very construction of society were a crime!"

"Ah," said Boussingault, delightedly, "then you perceive just my point. That is it; you put it well: modern society is The Great Crime—life is The Great Sin—what we have made of Life. Disease, Ignorance, Poverty, Wage-slavery, Child-slavery, Lust-slavery, Marriage-slavery! Marriage does not produce good children more than bad. Some of the highest types of humanity have been produced by the left hand. You ignore the positive side of selective breeding. If you can decide what constitutes a 'fit' man, how can you limit his racial gifts to the child-bearing capacities of one woman? And the woman, her, too; you must provide for selective futile polygamy and polyandry. You must be presented to the unmarried mother——"

"Really——" began Stainton.

"There is something in these your theories," interposed Boussingault, rushing to his conclusion, "but here you go too far and there half-way. In Germany, until German bureaucracy captures them, they are the great aids to the revolt of Womankind, your theories. Educate for parenthood, endow mothers, pension during pregnancy and nursing—what then? Name of God! You have more to do than that, my friend—we have more to do: we have to give every child born an equal chance, every man how much he earns; we must build a society where no superstition, no economic strain, no selfish 'usband keeps childless the woman that wants to be and ought to be a mother in marriage or outside; and we must recognise of all other women their inalienable right to refuse motherhood!" [Pg 197]

Stainton rose quickly.

"Here comes my wife," he said. "I am afraid we shall have to hurry away, doctor."

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## XII

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### MONTMARTRE

Alone in their *taxi-mètre*, Stainton and Muriel preserved for some time an awkward silence. Jim was waiting for some hint from her to indicate what would be his safest course. His wife sat rigid, her fists clenched in her lap.

"That doctor is a strange type," said Stainton at last.

"Horrid man! He's a *horrid* man!" gasped Muriel.

"Well, of course," said Stainton, seeking to steer her into the quiescence of a judicial attitude, "he is all wrong in his conclusions——"

"He picked his teeth," said Muriel.

Jim had preserved his own good manners to the age of fifty, but his years in mining-camps had blunted his observation of the lack of nicety in others.

"Did he?" asked Jim.

"Didn't you *see* him? He carries a gold toothpick around with him. I believe he was proud of it. It's—that's what made me sick."

"Then," enquired Jim, growing uncomfortable, "it wasn't what he said?"

"Said? You both sat up there and quarrelled——"

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"We didn't quarrel. The doctor has what seems to be the national manner, but we were merely discussing——"

"You were discussing me!" said Muriel. "I thought I should die. I don't know how I bore it; I——"

Jim slipped his arm around her waist. "My dear, my dear, how could you think such a thing? We were talking about a general subject. We were——Why, we didn't say anything that could possibly affect you."

"I don't care," Muriel declared: "everything that *he said*—that man—was awful."

"It was," admitted Stainton, glad that the burden of offence had again been shifted to Boussingault's shoulders. "It was, rather. I didn't know whether you were paying attention to it at all. To some of it I hoped you weren't."

"Nobody could help hearing such shouting. I was so afraid there might be some English or

Americans there."

"Still, you didn't appear to hear,"—Stainton spoke with relief at thought of this,—"so it was as well as it could be."

"I must have shown it, Jim. I thought my face would burn away."

"At any rate, you didn't talk."

"How *could* I?"

Stainton was silent for a few seconds. Then he asked:

"What did you mean by your question?"

Muriel took some time to reply:

"What question?"

"You know: the only one you asked—about—about children not being wanted?"

This time Muriel's answer was swift: she took her husband's broad shoulders in her arms and, as they rolled down the boulevard, began sobbing.

"I never want to see him again!" she vowed. "Never bring him to the hotel. I won't be at home if he comes. I won't see him. I won't!"

She suggested changing their hotel. She declared that, even if they did change, she could not sleep that night. She begged him to take her somewhere to amuse her and get her thoughts away from the dreadful Boussingault.

It was Stainton who proposed that they should see Montmartre—which term, when used by the travelling American, means to see two or three places in Montmartre conducted largely for Americans, which charge in strict accord with the French ideas of the average American's pocketbook, and are visible only between the hours of ten o'clock at night and four o'clock in the morning.

"Very well," said Jim; "we might go to Montmartre. I think we ought to see Montmartre."

"What's that?" asked Muriel.

"It's—oh, it's a part of Paris. You'll know when we get there."

"I don't remember hearing of it in our French course."

"I don't think it's included in the French course of a convent. I hope not."

"Why not?"

"For the very reason that we ought to go see it—now."

He was quite sure that he was sincere in his attitude. They were sightseers, and he had always been told that Montmartre was one of the sights of Paris. They had seen everything else. They had seen Notre Dame, the Sainte Chapelle, the markets, the Palais de Justice, the Chambre des Députés, the tomb of Napoleon—everything. They had enjoyed the Jardins des Tuileries and the pictures and sculpture of the Luxembourg Museum, and they had walked through the weary miles of painted canvases in the Louvre, where Muriel lingered before the spot at which the Mona Lisa had long hung. They had even permitted themselves the horrors of the Morgue. Why should Stainton not complete his knowledge of Paris, and why should he not, like most other Americans, take his wife, however young she was, to Montmartre with him? Jim had once said to Holt that he had, all his life long, kept himself clean. The curiosities of his youth had remained unsatisfied.

The strongest impulses are not infrequently those of which one is entirely unconscious. At Aiken, Stainton had yielded himself with the extravagance of the young man of twenty-five, which he thought he was, to the demands of the situation in which he found himself. At sea there had necessarily been a quieter period; but this had ended with the arrival of the Staintons in Paris. The tension of sightseeing had, alone, sufficed to wear them out, and now (though he persuaded himself that this was but the inevitable development of the novel into the commonplace) he began to fear that the high tide of his emotion might be sinking to the low level of habit and affection, that what was true of himself was also true of Muriel, and he drew the inference that another sort of sightseeing would be good for them both.

So they went to Montmartre.

At the advice of their chauffeur, they commenced with the Bal Tabarin. From the motor-car that had hauled them up the long hills of dark and tortuous streets, they stepped into a blaze of yellow light, under which half a dozen men hurried to them. One held the door of the cab; another, as if it were his sole business in life, wielded a folded newspaper as a shield to protect Muriel's gown from contamination by the motor's muddy tires; two pointed to the scintillating doorway, and two more chattered enquiries that Jim could in no wise interpret.

He knew, however, that there was one answer to every question: he doled out a handful of francs, in true American fashion, and then handed a purple and white bill to his wife.

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Curiously text-book French though it was, Muriel's French had proved really intelligible; she had rapidly acquired the power of comprehending a full third of the French addressed to her, and all this struck Stainton, who loved to follow the lips that were his, speaking a language that was not his and of which he was nearly ignorant, as a proof of her superiority. Therefore she now preceded him to the ticket window and made their purchase. A moment later a large man in a frock coat was ushering them, among capped and aproned maids that begged permission to check wraps, up to the double stairway at the end of the big ballroom and into a box twenty feet above the floor.

They sat down, conscious of themselves, and ordered a bottle of Ayala, presently served to them in goblets to play the rôle of wine-glasses—for one drinks champagne from goblets in Montmartre—and looked down at the dancers on the floor below. From its balcony at the other end of the hall a brass band was sending forth a whirlwind of quadrille music, and in the centre of the ballroom eight women danced the can-can. They were large women, some of them rather fat, and none of them rather young. They wore wide straw hats and simple tailored shirtwaists and dark skirts of a cut almost severe; but in sharp contrast to this exterior, when they danced, they displayed incredible yards and yards of lace petticoat and stockings that outshone the rainbow. [Pg 204]

"What do you think of it?" asked Stainton.

Muriel condemned the Bal Tabarin as she had condemned Boussingault.

"I think it's horrid," she replied. "Aren't they ugly?" But she did not take her eyes from the dancers.

All about the dancing-floor, except in that large circular clearing for the performers, were little tables where men and women sat and drank beer and smoked cigarettes. Along one side was a long bar at which both sexes were served. Everyone gave casual heed to the dancing; everyone applauded when he was pleased and hissed when he was not. Now and then a young woman would rush to a neighbouring table, seize upon a man and guide him madly about one corner of the floor in time to the music, and now and then it would be a young man that seized upon a woman, at which the patrons, if they paid any attention at all to it, smiled good-naturedly. At one of the most conspicuous tables were a couple kissing above their foaming beer-mugs, and nobody seemed to notice them. Clearly, this was a world where one did as one pleased, and, so long as one did not trespass upon the individuality of another, none objected. [Pg 205]

"Something new, isn't it?" asked Jim, rather dubiously.

"It's unbelievable," said Muriel, her face flushed.

"Shall we go?"

"No—we might as well wait a little while—until we've finished our champagne."

The quadrille ended. There were ten minutes during which the visitors to the place waltzed rapidly, with feet lifting high, about the floor. Down the centre two young girls were swaying together in a form of waltzing that neither of the Americans had ever seen before. A man and a woman, dancing, would embrace violently at every recurrence of a certain refrain.

Muriel slipped her hand along the rail of the box. Stainton, whose eyes were fixed on the dancers, started at her touch.

"Hold my hand," said Muriel.

He took her hand in his, lowering it from the view of the spectators.

"No," commanded Muriel: "on the rail, please."

"Certainly, but isn't that rather——"

"It seems to be the custom, Jim."

So he held her hand before them all, and soon found himself liking this.

A troupe of girls ran upon the floor and, to the music, began a performance in tumbling. The hair of one was loosened, the ribbon that held it fell at her slippered feet, and two men, from near-by tables, leaped upon it and struggled laughingly for possession of the trophy. [Pg 206]

The Staintons were intent upon this when they heard a low laugh behind them. They looked about: three women with bright cheeks were peeping through the swinging doors of the box. Involuntarily, Jim smiled, and, since a smile in Montmartre passes current for an invitation, the foremost of the girls entered, shutting out her companions.

"*Vous êtes Américains?*" she enquired.

Stainton's French went as far as that. He nodded.

"*Du nord ou du sud?*"

Jim was accustomed to thinking that there was but one real America.

"The United States," said he.

"Ver' well," laughed the girl in an English prettily accented. "Your good 'ealth, sar—and the good



'ealth of mademoiselle."

She raised from the table Jim's goblet of champagne and drank a little. It was evident that her English was now exhausted.

Jim, frankly puzzled, looked at Muriel.

"What shall we do?" he wondered.

He thought that Muriel would resent the intrusion, but Muriel did not seem to resent it.

"It appears to be the custom," said Muriel again. "I suppose that we had better ask her to sit down and have some champagne."

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"Very well," said Stainton, none too willingly. "You ask her, then: the French verb 'to sit' always was too much for me."

Muriel offered the invitation; the visitor laughingly accepted; another bottle was ordered and, while Jim, unable to understand what was being said, leaned over the rail and looked at the dancers, his wife and the vermilion-lipped intruder engaged in an encounter of small-talk that Muriel began by enjoying as an improvement at once of her French and her knowledge of the world.

The visitor, however, so managed the conversation that, though she did give Muriel her address in a little street off the Boulevard Clichy, it was she who was gathering information. She was extremely polite, but extremely inquisitive.

"You have been long in Paris, is it not?" she asked.

"No, not long; only two weeks," said Muriel.

"But in France—no?"

"We came direct to Paris."

"But you speak French well, mademoiselle."

The compliment pleased Muriel to the extent that she missed the title applied to her.

"My knowledge of French is very small," she replied. "I studied the language in America."

"In America? Truly? One would never suppose."

"We had a French nun for teacher."

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"Yes, yes. And monsieur your sweetheart, he does not speak French—no?"

Muriel started.

"Monsieur," she said, a little stiffly, "is my husband."

But the visitor, far from feeling reprimanded, was openly delighted.

"Your husband?" she echoed. "Very good. He is handsome, your husband."

"I think so," said Muriel.

"And it is always good," pursued the guest, "that the husband be much older than the wife, is it not?"

Instantly Muriel relapsed. She could not know that the girl spoke sincerely. She was among strangers, and, like most of us, instinctively suspected all whose native tongue was not her own.

"He is not much older!" she retorted.

"Oh—but yes. And it is well. It is so that it is most often arranged in France."

"No doubt—but our marriages are not 'arranged' for us in America. We choose for ourselves."

The visitor seemed surprised. She raised her long, high brows and looked from Stainton to Muriel.

"How then," she enquired, "you choose for yourself a man so much older?"

"I say he is *not* much older, not any older," said Muriel, despising herself for having fallen into such a discussion, yet unable, in an alien language, to disentangle herself.

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"But madame is a mere girl," said the visitor, seeking only to be polite.

"And my husband is young also," declared Muriel.

Something in the tone of this repetition convinced the French girl that the subject was not further to be pursued. She essayed another tack.

"And the babies?" she asked. "Is it that you brought with you the babies?"

Muriel's cheeks warmed again, and she looked away.

"We have no children," she responded, shortly.

"No children?" The visitor plainly considered this unbelievable. "You have no little babies? Then, why to marry?"

"No."

"Not one?"

"We have none."

"But how unhappy, how unfortunate for monsieur! Perhaps soon——"

"We have been married only a short time."

"Ah!" The French girl seemed to rest upon that as the sole reasonable explanation. "Then," she said with a note of encouragement in her tone, "it is not without hope. After a while you will have the babies."

Muriel was angry. She looked to Jim for rescue; but Jim was still leaning over the rail, engrossed in the spectacle presented by the dancers.

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"I do not want any children," said Muriel, suddenly.

"No children? You wish no children?" gasped her inquisitor. "You choose to marry, and yet you want no children? But why then did madame marry?"

Muriel rose.

"For reasons that you cannot understand," she said. "We must go now," she added; and she touched Jim's arm. "Come," she said to him; "let's go, Jim."

Stainton turned slowly.

"What's the hurry?" he asked.

"It must be after one o'clock," said Muriel.

"But we are in Montmartre."

"Yes—and we have still a great deal of it to see before daylight, I believe."

Jim rose.

"All right," he said.

The girl put out her hand.

"*S'il vous plaît, monsieur,*" she said: "*la petite monnaie.*"

Stainton had tried to take the extended hand to bid its owner good-night, but he noticed, before she began to speak, that it was turned palm upward.

"What's this?" he enquired of Muriel.

"My cab-fare," said the visitor in French, and Muriel, vaguely appreciating the fact that here was another custom of the country, translated.

"Give her a five-franc piece," she said. "Something of the sort is evidently expected."

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"So I have to pay her for the privilege of buying her champagne?" laughed Jim. "Ask her what I *am* paying for. I am curious about this."

"No," said Muriel.

"Do," urged Stainton.

But the girl appeared now to comprehend. She was not embarrassed.

"In brief," she explained, "for my time."

"You pay her," Muriel grudgingly translated, "for her time. But," she concluded, "I wouldn't pay her much, Jim."

"So that's it!" chuckled Stainton. "Oh, well, I don't want to seem stingy after all this discussion of it."

He handed her a ten-franc louis.

The girl's eyes caught the unexpected glint of gold.

"Oh, la-la-la!" she gurgled, and, with what seemed one movement, she pocketed the money; drank to Jim's health; flung her arms about him with a sounding kiss on his mouth, and ran giggling through the folding-doors.

Stainton, tingling with a strange excitement and looking decidedly foolish, gazed at his wife.

"What do you think of that?" he choked.

Muriel stood before him trembling, her black eyes ablaze.

"How *dared* you?" she demanded.

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"*I?*" Jim was still bewildered. "What on earth did *I* do?"

"And before my very eyes!" said Muriel.

"But, my dear, *I* didn't do anything. It was the girl——"

"You permitted it."

"I hadn't time to forbid. Besides, it would have been absurd to forbid. And she meant it as a compliment."

"Not to you. Don't flatter yourself, Jim."

"Well, at any rate, my dear, it is merely another custom of the quarter that we are in. Really, I scarcely think you should object."

"It was the money that she liked, Jim. I think that, as for you, you couldn't have been more absurd even if you had forbidden her."

He quieted her as best he could. They would go, he said, to L'Abbaye, of which their chauffeur had spoken to them; and to L'Abbaye, that most gilded and most brilliant of all the night palaces of Montmartre, they went.

They climbed the crowded stairs and paused for a moment in the doorway, while Jim began to divest himself of his overcoat. Muriel, ahead, was looking into the elaborate room.

Pale green and white it was and loud with laughter and music, with the popping of many corks and the chatter of persons that seemed to have no mission there save the common mission of enjoyment. In the centre was a cleared space, and there, among handsomely appointed tables, the white waistcoated men and radiantly-gowned women loudly applauding, two Spanish girls in bright costumes were dancing the sensuous mattchiche.

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Muriel saw that, at one of the tables nearest the dancers, was a young man who applauded more enthusiastically than any of his neighbours. She saw that the girls observed this and liked it. She saw one girl, with an especially violent embrace, seize her partner, hold her tight for an instant, release her, and then, dashing to the young man, extend her arms, to which the young man sprang amid the tolerant laughter of his companions. Muriel saw the Spanish girl and the young man continue the dance.

Quickly she wheeled to her husband.

"I don't want to go in here," she said.

"What?" Jim was utterly dumfounded.

She caught the lapels of his coat and held him, with his back to the room, in the position that he had thus far maintained.

"I say that I don't want to go in. Take me away. Here, these are the stairs. I'm tired. It's vulgar. I'm not well."

She released her hold of him and started to descend alone. He was forced to follow with hardly the chance to get his coat and hat.

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In the motor-car she grasped his face in her hot hands and fell, between sobs, to kissing him.

"I love you!—I love you!" she cried.

The young man with the Spanish dancer was Franz von Klausen.

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## XIII

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### WORMWOOD

When she awoke it was with a confused memory of a troubled night through which, as she dozed, she had known that Jim was often out of his bed, often walking up and down. She thought that she had once been worried lest he take cold, for he had been barefooted and without his dressing gown. She thought that she had sleepily asked him to be more careful, to return to rest. She thought that he had made a rather quick reply, bidding her sleep and not bother.

Now she saw him fully clothed and making stealthily for the door that opened on the hall. The morning light showed his face very grey; perhaps this was because he had not shaved, for clearly he had not shaved; but Muriel also noticed that the lines from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth seemed deeper than usual. She saw that he held his hat in his hand, that his coat was flung over his arm, and that the glance which he cast toward her, as he sought to determine whether the noise of the turned door knob had roused her, was the glance that might be

expected of a thief leaving a room that he had robbed.

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Then the thing that had happened came back to her. She closed her eyes and gladly let him go.

On his part, Stainton had guessed that she had sleepily seen him, but he was content because she refrained from questioning him, from any renewal of the enquiries that she had made when this new terror arose. He walked down the stairs, where scrubbing women shifted their pails of water that he might pass and smiled at him as old serving-women are accustomed to smile at the men they see leaving the hotel in the early morning. He knew what they thought, and he sickened at the contrast between their surmise and the truth.

He walked to the grands boulevards. It was too early to go to Boussingault's; he looked at the watch that he had been consulting every fifteen minutes for the past two hours, and he saw that for two hours more it would be too early to go. He stopped at a double row of round tables on the sidewalk outside a corner café. Only one of them was in use, and that by a haggard but nonchalant young man in a high hat and a closely buttoned overcoat that failed to conceal the fact that its owner was still in evening dress. The young man was drinking black coffee, and his hand trembled. Stainton sat at the table farthest from this other customer.

A dirty waiter appeared from the café and shuffled forward, adjusting his apron.

"*B'jour, monsieur,*" the waiter mumbled.

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Stainton did not return this salutation.

"*Une absinthe au sucre avec de l'eau,*" he ordered.

He had tasted the stuff only once before, and that was thirty years ago. He had hesitated to order it now, because he feared that the waiter would show a superior wonder at any man's ordering absinthe on the boulevard at eight o'clock in the morning.

The waiter showed no surprise. He brought the tumbler, placed it on the little plate that bore the figures indicating the price of the drink, put the water bottle and the absinthe bottle beside it and held the glass dish full of lumps of dusty sugar. When Jim had served himself after the manner in which he had recently seen Frenchmen, of an afternoon, serving themselves, the waiter withdrew.

The sun emerged from the clouds that so often shroud its early progress toward the zenith on a day of that season in Paris and fell with unkind inquisitiveness upon the young man with the coffee and the old one with the wormwood. The street began to awake with shopgirls painted for their work as they had lately been painted for what they took to be their play, upon clerks going to their banks and offices, upon newsboys shrilly crying the titles of the morning journals. The boys annoyed Jim by the leer with which they accompanied the gesture that thrust the papers beneath his nose; the clerks annoyed him by their knowing smiles; the girls annoyed him most because they would call one another's attention to him, comment to one another about him, and laugh. Of these people the first two sorts envied him for what they thought he had been doing; the last sort saw in him a good fellow with a heart like their own hearts; but Jim hated them all.

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He gulped the remainder of his absinthe and, hailing an open carriage, went for a drive in the Bois. He bade the coachman drive slowly, but, when he returned to the city and was left at the doctor's address, he found himself the first patient in the waiting-room.

Was *M. le médecin* in? Yes, the grave manservant assured, but he doubted if *M. le médecin* could as yet receive monsieur. It was early, and *M. le médecin* rarely saw any patients before—

Stainton produced his card and a franc. He had not long to wait before the double-doors of the consulting room opened and Boussingault cheerily bade him enter.

"The good day, the good day!" Boussingault was as leathery of face and as voluble as he had been on the evening previous. He took both of Jim's hands and shook them. "It is the early bird that you are, *hein?* Did the dinner of last night not well digest? Sit. We shall see. It is not my specialty; I help for to eat: I do not help for to digest. But what is a specialty that one to it should confine one's self with a friend? Sit."

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The room was lined by bookcases full of medical and social works and pamphlets in French, German, and English: Freud's "Sammlung Kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehr," Duclaux's "L'Hygiène Sociale," Solis-Cohen's "Therapeutics of Tuberculosis," Ducleaux, Fournier, Havelock Ellis, Forel, Buret, Neisser, Bloch. There were some portraits, there was a chair that looked as if it could be converted with appalling ease into an operating table, there was a large electric battery and there was a flat-topped desk covered with phials and loose leaves from a memorandum book. Boussingault seated himself, grunting, at his desk, his back to the window, and indicated a chair that faced him.

Stainton took the chair. He was still pale, and the corners of his ample mouth were contracted.

"My digestion is all right," he said. "What bothers me is something else. I dare say it's not—not much. I know that these things may be the merely temporary effect of some slight nervous depression, of physical weariness, or—or a great many minor things. Only, you know, one does like to have a physician's assurance."

Boussingault peered through his bar-bound *pince-nez*. He began to understand.

"Nervous depression," said he: "one does not benefit that by absinthe before the *déjeuner*."

Stainton tried to smile.

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"That was my first absinthe in thirty years and the second in my life," he said; "but I dare say I am rather redolent of it, for the fact is I took it on an empty stomach."

The doctor leaned across the desk, his hands clasped on its surface.

"M. Stainton," he asked, "you come here to-day as a patient, is it not?"

"Well, I hope that I won't need any treatment, but——"

"But you do not come here to pass the time, *hein?*"

"No, doctor."

"Then," said Boussingault, spreading out his hands and shrugging his shoulders, "tell me why in the so early morning, not sick, you take absinthe for the second time in your life."

He was looking at Stainton in a manner that distinctly added to Jim's nervousness. The American was not a man to quail before most, and he had come here to get this expert's opinion on a vital matter; yet he feared to furnish the only data on which an opinion could, to have use, be founded.

"Well, doctor," he said, trying hard for the easiest words, "you—you met my wife last evening."

Boussingault's bullet head bobbed.

"What then?" he inquired.

"What do you think of her?"

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"I think that she is very charming—and, M. Stainton, very young."

It struck Jim that the concluding phrase had been weighted with significance.

"I don't know just how to tell you," he resumed. "I don't like to talk even to my physician of—of certain intimate matters; but"—he glanced at the most conspicuous volumes on the nearest shelf—"from the titles of these books, I think that what I want to see you about falls within the limits of your specialty."

He stopped, gnawing his lower lip, his mind seeking phrases. Before he could find a suitable one, his vis-à-vis, looking him straight in the eyes, had settled the matter:

"My friend, there are but two reasons why one that is no fool should drink absinthe at an hour so greatly early: or he has been guilty of excess and regrets, or he has been unable to be guilty and regrets." He paused, his face thrust half across the desk. "Madame," he demanded, "she is how old?"

Stainton met him bravely now, but in a manner clearly showing his anxiety to protect himself.

"She is nearly nineteen."

"Eighteen, *bien*. And you?"

Jim drew back. He took a long breath; his fingers held tightly to the arms of his chair.

"Before I married," he said, "only a very short time before I married, I had myself looked over carefully by one of the most eminent physicians in New York. He assured me that I was in perfect physical condition, that I was not by any means an old man, that, as a matter of fact——"

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Boussingault thumped the desk with his forefinger.

"Poof, poof! I do not ask of your heart, your liver, your *biceps flexor*. How many years are you alive?"

"Doctor," said Stainton, "I don't think you quite understand——"

"I understand well what I want to know. Are you married a long time?"

"On the contrary."

"And your age?"

Stainton realised that it must be foolishly feminine longer to fence.

"Fifty," he belligerently declared.

Dr. Boussingault leaned back, spread wide his arms, and smiled.

"*Vous voilà!*"

"But, doctor, wait a moment. You don't understand——"

"My friend, if you understand these things more well than do I, why is it that you come to me? A man of fifty, he but recently marries a girl of eighteen——"

"But I have lived a careful life!"

"We all do. I have never known a drunkard; all of my drunkards, they are moderate drinkers."

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"I drink no more than you."

"I was not speaking literally, monsieur."

"I have lived in the open air," said Jim.

"La-la-la!"

"And I have been abstemious. You understand me now: absolutely abstemious."

It was obvious that Boussingault doubted this, but he made a valiant effort to speak as if he did not.

"If Jacques never has drunk," said he, "brandy will poison him."

Stainton rose.

"I am as sound as a bell," he vowed.

Boussingault did not rise. He only leaned back the farther and smiled the more knowingly.

"Yet you are here," said he.

Stainton took a turn of the room. When he had risen he had meant to leave, but he knew that such a course was folly. When he turned, he showed Boussingault a face distorted by anguish.

"What can I do?" he asked. His voice was low; his deportment was as restrained as he could make it. "She is a girl——"

"Were madame forty-five," said the physician, "you would not have come to consult me."

"Surely it's not fair, doctor. After all my repression—all my life of—of——"

Boussingault rose at last. He came round the desk and, with a touch of genuine affection in the movement, slipped an arm through one of Jim's.

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"We every one feel that," said he. "It goes nothing. The pious man, he comes to me and says: 'It is not fair; I have been too good to deserve!' The old roué, he comes to me and says—the same thing. We all some day curse Nature; but Nature, she does not make exceptions for the reward of merit; she cares nothing for morals; she cares only for the excess on one side or other, and for the rest she lays down her law and follows it with regard to no man."

"At the worst," said Jim, his face averted, "I am only fifty."

"With a girl-wife," sighed Boussingault. "Name of God!"

"And I am in good shape," pleaded Jim.

The Frenchman's hand pressed Stainton's arm.

"Listen," he said, "listen, my friend, to me. I am Boussingault, but even Boussingault is not Joshua that he can turn back the sun or make him to stand still. If you were the Czar of the Russias or M. Roosevelt, I could not do for you that. You have taken this young girl from her young friends; you give her yourself in their stead, no one but yourself with whom to speak, to share her childish thoughts—you try to live downwards to her years with both your mind and your physique. It is not possible, my friend. But you have not come to a plight so bad. Nature is not cruel. It is not all worse yet. This is not the end, no. It is the beginning. You but must not try to be too young, and you have perhaps time left to you. It may be, much time. Who knows? You must remember your age and you must live in accord with your age. Now, just now—Poof! It goes nothing. You require more quiet, some rest. Find a reason for to quit madame for a week. Madame Boussingault, my wife, she will pay her respects to Madame Stainton and request that she come to stay with us. Make affairs call you from Paris. Rest. See. I give you this prescription, but it is nothing in itself. It will quiet you, no more. You must yourself rest."

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He darted to the desk, fumbled among its papers, wrote upon one, and handed it to Jim. Then he continued for ten minutes to talk in the same strain, as before.

"Of course," said Jim, "in a little while it would all have been easier."

"In a little while?"

"There will be a child."

Boussingault's friendliness nearly vanished.

"What?" he said. "And you—you——Thousand thunders, these Americans here!"

At this Stainton himself grew angry.

"Do you think I am a brute?" he said. "It is far off."

"Hear him!" Dr. Boussingault appealed to the ceiling. "Hear him! 'It is far off!' Name of a name! Go you one day to the consulting room of the great Pinard at the Clinique Baudelocque and read the '*Avis Important*' he there has posted on the door."

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It needed quite a quarter of an hour more for the physician to explain and for Stainton to recover his temper, which, generally gentle, had been tried by this new threat of evil and was now the more being tried by the reaction of his system against the absinthe. Then, after Madame Boussingault had been seen and the arrangements for Muriel's visit had been completed, the doctor sent him away with more advice and more exclamations against the ignorance of the average man and woman of maturity.

"A week," he said, patting Stainton's broad, straight back. "One little week. We must ourselves sever from the so charming lady for so long, for we know that, ultimately, an absence will work for even her good. Is it not, *hein?* But the not-knowing profound of mankind! Incredible! Truly. Nine-tens of my women patients, they are married, who of themselves know not half so much as the savage little girl of ten years. And the men, they I think no more wise."

Stainton passed through the now crowded waiting-room and into the sunlit street in a mood that wavered between rebellion and submission. He walked to the Chatham and, once arrived, walked past the hotel. He did this twice, when, with the realisation that he hesitated from fear of Muriel, he mastered his timidity and entered.

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His wife was still in bed. Her eyes were closed, but Stainton knew that she was not asleep. He went to her and kissed her.

"Muriel," he said, "I am going to Lyons."

She did not open her eyes.

"Yes," she said.

"I think that I ought to go," said Stainton, "and clean up this matter of the sale. I shall get the American consul there to recommend a good lawyer, and I'll complete the whole transaction as soon as I can."

"Yes."

"It will probably take an entire week," pursued Stainton. He waited. "I don't like to leave you alone in Paris, but you'd be frightfully lonely in Lyons, and I shall be busy—very busy. Now, I know you don't like Boussingault. I don't like his opinions myself, but he is a leading man in his specialty, and his wife is a good woman. She has said that she will call on you this afternoon and take you to stay with her."

Muriel was silent.

"That's all," said Stainton, "except that there is a train from the Gare de Lyon at noon, and I ought to take it."

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"Then you have been to Dr. Boussingault?" asked Muriel.

"Yes, dear."

"And he—"

"He said the—the change was what I needed."

He busied himself packing a bag. At last he came again to the bed and bent over her.

"Good-bye," he said.

She raised her lips, and he strained her to him. He did not trust himself to say more, and he was grateful to her for her refusal to ask any further question. She kissed him, her eyes unopened. All that he knew was that she kissed him.

Muriel lay quiet for some time. Then she got up and dressed and shuddered when she looked at herself in the mirror, and tightened her stays. Yet she dressed carefully before going out for a long walk.

In the Tuileries Gardens she watched the gaily costumed maids and wet nurses with their little charges. She saw a woman of the working class, who was soon to be a mother. She looked away.

She hailed a passing cab.

"Drive me to the Boulevard Clichy," she said in French.

The driver nodded.

Muriel entered the cab. She had an important errand.

Late in the afternoon she returned to the Chatham and left it with a suitcase in her hand. She told the unsurprised clerk at the *bureau* that her rooms were to be held for her, but that she would be absent for five days.

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"If anyone calls," she said, "you will say that I have gone to Lyon with monsieur."

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## XIV

### RUNAWAYS

Stainton returned to Paris at the end of eight days in far better spirits than he had been in when he left. He had sold the mine at nearly his own figure, and he had what he considered reasons for believing that Dr. Boussingault had exaggerated his condition. Muriel's letters had, to be sure, been unsatisfactory; they had been brief and hurried; far from congratulating him on the success of his business affairs when he announced it, they made no mention of it; but then, he had never before received any letters from Muriel, and doubtless these represented her normal method of correspondence. He concluded that if they were below the normal, that was due to the cares of her condition.

Their sitting-room at the Chatham was dim when he entered it, for the day was dull, and Muriel had several of the curtains drawn. She rose to meet him, and he embraced her warmly.

"Hello," he said. "You understood my wire, didn't you? I didn't want to have to say 'howdy' to my sweetheart at the Boussingaults'. Oh, but it's good to be with you again!"

"What wire?" asked Muriel.

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"Why, didn't you get it?" said Stainton. "The wire telling you to come here."

"Oh," said Muriel, "that one? Yes."

"You see," explained Jim as he kissed her again and again, "I wanted to have you right away all to myself; that's why I asked you to come back here."

"Yes," said Muriel, "that was better. I didn't want to have you meet me before those strangers."

"Not exactly strangers, dear; but it's better to be together, just our two selves—just our one self, isn't it? And we'll be that always now," he continued joyously as he sat down in an arm-chair and drew her to his knee. "Just we two. No more business. Never again. I have earned my reward and got it. The blessed mine has served its turn and is gone—going, going, gone—and at a splendid figure. Sold to M. Henri Duperré Boussingault et Cie., for—I told you the figure, didn't I—*our* figure? Isn't it splendid?"

"I am glad," said Muriel.

"You don't really object?" he asked.

"Why should I? Of course I am glad."

"But don't you remember? Once you said that you didn't want me to sell it."

"Did I? Oh, yes; I do remember—but you showed me how foolish that was."

He laughed happily.

"I am a great converter," he said. "If you could only have heard me converting those Frenchmen to my belief in the mine, Muriel—and mostly through interpreters, too; for only two of them spoke any English, and you know what my French is. But I wrote you all that."

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"Yes," replied Muriel, "you wrote me all that."

"I can't say so much for your letters," Jim went on. "They were a little brief, dearie: brief and rather vague. Did you miss me?"

"Yes, Jim."

"Did you? Maybe I didn't miss you! Oh, how I wanted to be with you. On Wednesday, while they were thinking it over for the hundredth time and there was nothing for me to do but knock about Lyons, I nearly jumped on a train to come all the way here to see you. How would you have liked that?"

"I should——" She stopped and put her head on his shoulder.

"Poor dear," he said; "poor lonely girly! You did miss me, then? Were the Boussingaults kind? Of course they were; but how were they kind? Tell me all about your visit there. I was glad to get every line you wrote me; I kissed your signature every night and each morning; but you didn't tell me much news, dearest. Tell me now about your visit to the Boussingaults."

Muriel sat upon his knee.

"I didn't go to the Boussingaults," she said.

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"What?" Stainton started so that he almost unseated her.

"I didn't go to the Boussingaults," she repeated.

"But, dearest, how—What?—Where were you? You mean to say that you stayed here, alone, in this hotel?"

She nodded.



Stanton was amazed; he was shocked that she could have deceived him and sorely troubled at the effect of this on the Boussingaults.

"You never told me," he said. "You might have told me, Muriel. Why did you do such a foolish thing? Why did you do it?"

Muriel stood up. She turned her back toward him.

"I don't know," she said. "I—Oh, you know I couldn't bear that man!"

"But you might have told me, dear. Why, all my letters went there! Then you never got my letters?"

She shook her head.

"Muriel! And you pretended—Didn't Madame Boussingault call for you? She said she would call the afternoon that I left."

"I suppose she did."

"Suppose! Don't you know?" Jim also was on his feet. "Didn't you see her? You don't mean to say that you didn't see her?"

"I didn't see her. I left word at the *bureau* that I was out. I left word that I had gone to Lyons with you." [Pg 234]

"Good heavens, Muriel! What will they think? What must they be thinking right now? My letters to you went there. I wrote every day. They would know from the arrival of those letters addressed to you from Lyons that you weren't with me."

She sank on a chair and began feebly to cry.

Jim knelt by her, his annoyance remaining, but his heart touched.

"There, there!" he said. "I understand. You wanted to go with me and were afraid to say so. I wish now that you had gone. That doctor is a fool. He must be a fool. And he isn't a pleasant man. I understand, dearie. Don't say any more. I was cruel——"

"No, no!" sobbed Muriel.

"I was. Yes, I was."

"You are the best man in the world, only—only——"

"I was the worst, the very worst. If you only had told me how you felt, dearest. If you only hadn't deceived me!"

"I had to."

"Out of consideration for me."

"No."

"It was. I understand. You thought the trip alone would do me good, and so you wouldn't say a word to change my plans." He had no thought for anything but contrition now. "And you stuck it out. My poor, brave, lonely darling! To think of me being so callous! How could I? And you in your condition!" [Pg 235]

She drew from him.

"Jim——" she said.

"I won't hear you accuse yourself," he protested.

"But, Jim——"

"Not now. Not ever. Not another word. Never mind the Boussingaults. Boussingault is a physician, after all, and will understand when I tell him."

"Don't tell him, Jim."

"We'll see; we'll see."

"Please don't. I hate him so, I never want to have to think of him again."

"Don't you bother, dearie. You are the finest woman that ever lived."

"But, Jim, I'm not." She kept her head averted. "I am—I dare say I am as bad——"

"Stop," he commanded. "I won't hear it. Not even from you. I will not. Think, dearest: we are foolish to be unhappy. We have every reason in the world to be happy. We are rich. We have no business to bother or interfere with whatever we may want to do. We love each other and soon"—he broke the tacit treaty of silence concerning their child—"in a few months we are to have a little baby to complete everything."

"Don't!" said Muriel. [Pg 236]

But Stainton took her by both hands and raised her and kissed her.

"Not this time," he said. "This once I am going to have my way. I am going to make you happy in spite of yourself. We shall never see or hear of Boussingault again if you are only as obedient as you are nearly always. It is still early afternoon. We are going out together and make a tour of the shops."

She lifted her face with a troubled smile.

"I have everything I want," she said.

"Poor dear," said Stainton, "you're pale. I suppose you scarcely dared to go out of doors while I was away. No, come on: we shall go now."

"Please," said Muriel; "I have all I want."

"All?" smiled her husband.

"Of course I have. You've got me such loads of lovely things already that I don't know what I am to do with them all and where to pack them. You know you have got me ever so much, Jim."

"For yourself, perhaps I have got you a few things, dearie; and I'm glad you like them. But I have always heard that Paris was the place to get some other sort of things. Aren't there some of those—some little things—some little lace things that we ought to get against the arrival of the newcomer? I am so proud, Muriel, and I want the newcomer to know I am."

Muriel's voice faltered.

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"So soon——" she said.

"We might as well make what preparations we can while we are in the city where the best preparations can be made. No, no. You must come. Come along."

She went with him, pale and silent, and Jim led her through shop after shop and forced her, by good-natured insistence, to buy baby clothes. She protested at the start; she tried to cut the expedition in half; she endeavoured to postpone this purchase or that; but he would not heed her. He urged her to suggest articles of the infantile toilette of which he was totally ignorant; when she declared that she knew as little as he, he made her translate his questions to the frankly delighted shop clerks. He had been inspired with the idea that, by such a process as this, he could bring her to a proper point of view in regard to the approaching event, and he did not concede failure until Muriel at last broke down and fainted in their *taxi-mètre*.

The next morning she told Jim that she wanted to go away.

"All right," said Stainton: after his journey from Lyons he had slept long and heavily and was still very tired. "Where'd you like to go?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. I'm not particular."

"Well, we'll think it over to-day and look up the time-tables."

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They were in their sitting-room at the hotel. Muriel parted the curtains and stood looking out upon a grey day.

"I don't want to think it over," she said.

"But we've got to know where we're going before we start."

"I don't see why. Besides, I said I wasn't particular where we went. I want to go to-day."

"To-day?" Jim did not like to rush about so madly, and his voice showed it.

"Why not? Look at the weather. Half the time we've been here it's been like this. I don't think Paris agrees with me."

He softened.

"Aren't you well?"

"No."

"What is it? My dear child!" He came toward her.

"Don't call me that," she said.

"Why not, Muriel?"

"It sounds as if you were so much older than I am. Jim——" She put her hand in his—"I'm horrid, I know——"

"You're never that!"

"Yes I am. I'm horrid now. You don't know. I'm not ill, but I'm so tired of Paris. It grates on my nerves. Let's go away now. The servants can pack, and we can be somewhere else by evening."

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Again Muriel took refuge at the window.

"There's Switzerland," she said. "I should like to see the Alps."

"Isn't it rather early in the year for them?"

"I don't think so."

"It'll be cold, dear."

"Well, we can stand a little cold, Jim. If we wait till the warm weather, we shall run into all the summer tourists."

She had her way. The servants packed, and Jim went out to make arrangements. In an hour he was back.

"All right," he triumphantly announced. "I've ordered our next batch of mail sent on as far as Neuchâtel. We can get a train in forty-five minutes to Dijon, where we might as well stop over night. I found a ticket-seller that spoke some sort of English—and here are the tickets. Can you be ready?"

She was ready. They started at once upon a feverish and constantly distracting journey.

The night was passed at Dijon. In the early morning they boarded their train for Switzerland, went through the flat country east of Mouchard, then swept into the Juras, climbing high in air and looking over fruitful plains that stretched to the horizon and were cut by white strips of road which seemed to run for lengths of ten miles without deviation from their tangent. The train would plunge into a black tunnel and emerge to look down at a little valley among vineyards with old red-tiled cottages clustered around a high-spired church. Another tunnel would succeed, and another red-tiled village and high-spired church would follow. Mile upon mile of pine-forest spread itself along the tracks, and then, at last, toward late afternoon, far beyond Pontarlier and the fortified pass to the east of it, there was revealed, forward and to the right, what Muriel mistook for jagged, needle-like clouds about a strip of the sky: the lake of Neuchâtel with the white Sentis to the Mont Blanc Alpine range, the Jungfrau towering in its midst.

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But a day at Neuchâtel sufficed Muriel; on the next morning she wanted to move on. She made enquiries.

"We might motor to Soleure," she said to Stinton, and when the motor was finally chosen, she decided for the train and Zurich.

"Why, they say there is nothing much to see in Zurich," Jim faintly protested.

"Let's find out for ourselves," said Muriel. "Besides, we have done almost no travelling, and that's what we came for, and now you've no business and nothing else to do."

So they were en route again on the day following, by way of Berne, through the wooded mountains, past the loftily placed castle of Aarburg, past picturesque Olten and Brugg with its ancient abbey of Königsfelden, where the Empress Elizabeth and Queen Agnes of Hungary had sought to commemorate the murder of the Emperor Albert of Austria by John of Swabia, five hundred years before. They saw the hotels of Baden and the Cistercian abbey of Wettingen, and they came, by noon, to Zurich.

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They lunched and took a motor drive about the city. In the midst of their tour, just as they were speeding through the Stadthaus-Platz on their way to the Gross-Münster, Muriel said:

"I believe you were right, after all, Jim. There isn't much to see here. Let's go on to-morrow."

It was a tribute to his powers of prediction.

"Very well," he answered. "As a matter of fact, I should like to go back to the hotel this minute and lie down."

She would not hear of that.

"Oh, no!" she protested. "There is the Zwingli Museum, the Hohe Promenade, and the National Museum to see. We mustn't miss them, you know. What would Aunt Ethel say?"

Nor could she permit him to miss them. She seemed to thrive as much upon the labour as if she had been shopping as she used to shop in her unmarried days, and she dragged him after her, a husband more weary than he had often been in his pilgrimages through the Great Desert.

"To-morrow," he yawned, as he flung himself down to sleep, eight hours later, "we shall start for some place where we can rest and see a few real Alps. We'll go to the Engadine."

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Muriel was seated at some distance from the bed. She was stooping to loosen her boots, and her hair fell over her face and hid it.

"Don't let's go there," she said. "Let's go to Innsbruck."

"Innsbruck? That's in Austria, isn't it?"

"Is it? Well, what if it is, Jim?"

"I thought you wanted to see Switzerland."

"We've seen it, haven't we?"

"Only a slice of it; and it must be a long and tiresome ride to Innsbruck."

Muriel dropped one boot and then the other and carried them outside the door.

"Anyhow," she said, returning, "we have seen enough of Switzerland to know what it's like, Jim. I'm awfully tired of it." She came to the bed and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Do you mind, dear?" she added.

"Oh, no," he sighed. "I suppose not. Only let's go to sleep now: I am about done up."

Muriel said nothing to that, but the next morning she assumed the plan to be adopted, and they went to Innsbruck. They went by the way that Franz von Klausen had described to her: by the narrow, mountain-guarded Waldersee, the Castle Lichtenstein, the ruins of Gräphang and, on the great rock that rises over Berschia, the pilgrim-church of St. Georgen. [Pg 243]

Jim had tipped the guard to secure, at least for a time, the privacy of their compartment, and the guard, a little fellow with flaring moustaches and a uniform that was almost the uniform of an officer, saluted gravely and promised seclusion. Thus, for some hours, they had the place to themselves, but the train gradually filled, and at last there entered a young Austrian merchant, who insisted upon giving them a sense of his knowledge of English and American literature.

"All Austrians of culture read your Irving," he said; "also your Harte and Twain and Do-*nelli*."

"Our what?" asked Jim.

"Please?"

"I didn't catch that last name."

"Donelli—Ignatius Donelli."

"Oh! Ignatius Donnelly—yes."

"Indeed, yes, sir; and you will find few that do not by the heart know of Shakespeare: 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen, come listen to me!'"

The Austrian left the train just before they reached the six-and-a-half-mile Arlberg Tunnel and, when they returned to daylight after twenty minutes, Stainton asked his wife:

"Didn't that fellow remind you of von Klausen?"

Muriel moved uneasily. Von Klausen's name had not been mentioned more than twice between them since they had left the *Friedrich Barbarossa*. [Pg 244]

"Why, no," she answered.

"I thought they spoke alike, Muriel."

"Did you? As I remember the Captain, his English was better."

Stainton reflected.

"Perhaps it was," he admitted. "But, by the way, your Austrian seemed rather to neglect us in Paris."

"My Austrian? Why mine?"

"By right of discovery. You discovered him, didn't you?"

"You mean that he discovered me. I don't like Captain von Klausen."

He attempted to argue against her prejudice, and they came near to quarrelling. In the end, Muriel protested with tears that she hated all Austrians and all Austria, and that they must move on to Italy at once.

Stainton obtained only a day's respite in Innsbruck. They drove to the Triumphal Gate at the extremity of the Maria-Theresien-Strasse and then across to the scene of the Tyrolese battles at Berg Isel, returning by way of the Stadthaus Platz, where the band was playing in the pale spring sunshine and where, in rôles of gallants to the fashionable ladies of the city, strolled, in uniforms of grey, of green, and of light blue, scores of dapper, slim-waisted Austrian officers. But Muriel said that the women were dowdy and their escorts effeminate; she scorned the "Golden Roof" because the gilt was disappearing and the copper showing through; she pronounced the Old Town, with its mediæval roofed-streets, unwholesome; she would not stop for beer at the Goldene Adler, where Hofer drank. That worn and tarnished Hofkirche, "the Westminster of the Tyrol," with its grotesque statues and its empty tomb of Maximilian, she dismissed as "a dirty barn." [Pg 245]

Muriel was cold; she said that she wanted to find warm weather. Stainton was tired; he said that he wanted to find a place where they could loaf. So they left for Verona, feeling certain that they would there secure these things—and "sunny Italy" welcomed them with a snowstorm.

Muriel was again in tears.

"It's no use," she sobbed; "we can't get what we want anywhere."

"Of course we can," sighed Stainton, "and the snowstorm will clear. Cheer up, dear; we've only to

look hard enough or wait a bit."

"But I'm tired of looking and waiting—we've been doing that ever since we went away. Let's go back to Paris."

Back to Paris! She had taken him on this nerve-destroying journey; she had headed for this place and swerved to that; she had exhausted them both by her unaccountable whims and her switching resolutions—and now she wanted to go back to Paris!

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"You said that Paris didn't agree with you, dear," pleaded Stainton.

"I know; but now it will be spring there—real spring—and everyone says that is the most beautiful time of the year in Paris."

"Yet the climate——"

"It will suit me in the spring; I know it will."

"Do you think"—Stainton put his hand upon hers—"do you think that you can rest there: really rest?"

"I know I can. O, Jim, I try to like it here, but I can't speak a word of Italian, and the French of these people is simply awful. I did my best to be good in Innsbruck, but I don't know any German, either, and so I hated that. Do you realise that we've been hurrying—hurrying—hurrying, so that we are really worn to shreds?"

"I know it," said Stainton. He was so travel-wearied that he looked sixty years old.

"I dare say that is what has made me so horrid," said Muriel: "that pull, pull, pull at my nerves. I don't know *what's* the matter with me; but I'm quite sure that getting back to Paris will be like getting back home."

This is how it came about that, two days later, they were once more quartered at the Chatham.

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## XV

[Pg 247]

### "NOT AT HOME"

"A gentleman to see madame."

The servant came into the sitting-room with a card. Jim was at the barber's; he had done nothing but sleep since their return, twenty-four hours earlier, and Muriel had urged him to "go down and get rubbed up" at a shop where, as he had discovered during their first stay in Paris, there was a French barber that did not get the lather up his patient's nose. She was now, therefore, alone. She took the card: it was that of Captain von Klausen.

"I am not at home," said Muriel.

"Yes, madame," said the servant. He hesitated a moment and then added: "This same gentleman called, I believe, on the afternoon of the day that madame, last week, left. I chanced to be in the bureau at the time, and it was there that he made his enquiries. The gentleman seemed disappointed."

"I am not at home," repeated Muriel.

This time the servant received the phrase in silence. He bowed himself out and left her seated, a touch of red burning in her pale and somewhat wasted cheeks; but he had scarcely gone before the door of the sitting-room again opened and Jim appeared. He had met von Klausen downstairs and had brought him along.

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In his frock-coat the Austrian looked taller and slimmer than ever, and his face appeared to be even younger than when she had last seen it. Aglow with health and warm with the pleasure of this meeting, it had an air singularly boyish and innocent. The waxed blond moustache failed utterly to lend it severity, and the blue eyes sparkled with youth. Had Stainton been told of what Muriel had seen at L'Abbaye, he would have protested that her eyes deceived her: it was incredible that this young fellow, whose smile was so honest and whose blush was as ready as a schoolgirl's, as ready as Muriel's own, could ever have frequented Montmartre and danced there in public with a hired Spanish woman.

Nevertheless, Muriel was annoyed. She was annoyed lest they had fallen in with the servant, which they had not done, and been told that she was out. She was annoyed with Jim because he had brought to call upon her a man that, only a few days before, she had told him she disliked. And she was distinctly annoyed with von Klausen.

Yet the interview passed off pleasantly enough. Jim was never the man to observe under a woman's conventional politeness, even when that politeness was ominously intensified, the fires of her disapproval, and von Klausen, if indeed he saw more than the husband, at least appeared to see no more. He remained to tea.

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"Why on earth did you bring *him* here?" asked Muriel as soon as the door had closed on the Austrian.

"Why, did you mind?"

"I told you that I didn't like him."

"I know, but you didn't seem to mind."

"I managed not to be rude to your guest, that's all. Jim, you must have remembered that I said I didn't like him."

"Yes, I do remember," Stainton confessed; "but the fact is that I brought him because I couldn't very well get out of bringing him. He was so extremely glad to see me that I couldn't merely drop him in the lobby."

"How did he know that we were here?"

"I told him on the boat that we were to stop here."

"But we have been and gone and returned since then."

"Then I suppose he found us out in the same way that Boussingault did: in the hotel news of the *Daily Mail*."

"Well, you might have told him that I wasn't at home. That's what I told the servant when his card was sent up."

"Yes, Muriel, I might have tried that, and, as a matter of fact, I did think of it; but then he would have hung on to me downstairs, and I knew you would be lonely up here without me." [Pg 250]

Muriel turned away to observe herself in a long mirror.

"You know I don't like him," she repeated.

"Yes, yes, dear, but what was I to do. Besides, he is really a very good fellow; I really can't see why you don't like him. What reason can you have for your prejudice?"

"When a woman can give a reason for disliking a man," said Muriel, "she hasn't any. If her dislike comes just because she has no reason there's generally good ground for it."

"There's nothing wrong with von Klausen," said Jim. "Besides, he's a mere boy."

"Please don't talk about his youth. He is at least five years older than I am."

"Are you so very aged, my dear?"

"I am old enough, it appears, to be the wife of my young husband."

Stainton kissed her.

"Well said," he declared; "your young husband has been so weather-beaten that he has been a pretty poor sort of spouse lately. We won't worry any more about von Klausen."

Yet to worry about von Klausen they were forced. They seemed, during the next ten days, to meet him everywhere, and he was always so polite that his invitations could not be contumeliously refused. He took them to the opera and to supper afterwards, and they, at last, had to ask him to dine. [Pg 251]

It was in the midst of this dinner at Les Fleurs that Stainton, begging his guest's pardon, glanced at a letter that had been handed him as he and Muriel that evening left the hotel.

"Hello," he said, "these French business-men are not so slow, after all. They have drawn the final papers, and I am to sign them to-morrow."

He turned to Muriel.

"So," he said, "I shall have to break our agreement this once, Muriel, and leave you alone for the morning. Will you forgive me?"

Muriel smiled.

"I'll try," she said.

"You won't be bored?"

"Oh, I'll be bored, of course, but I shall make the best of it."

"Permit me," interposed von Klausen, "to offer my services to Mrs. Stainton."

"Your services?" asked Muriel.

"To occupy you during your husband's absence. It is unendurable to think of you as wholly deserted—is it not, sir?"

The Austrian was addressing Jim. Stainton and his wife exchanged a quick glance. Jim was thinking of her expression of dislike for the Captain; Muriel was annoyed because her husband

had neglected to read his letter before they joined von Klausen: she was in the mood for revenge. [Pg 252]

"Oh, she'll make out," said Stainton. "Won't you, Muriel?"

"I don't know," replied Muriel. "It will be very dull."

"Then I renew my offer," said von Klausen.

"But, Captain," protested Jim, apparently blind to everything but his wife's prejudice, "we couldn't think of imposing on you."

"An imposition—Mr. Stainton! How an imposition? A privilege, I assure you, sir."

"But your duties at the Embassy?"

"One can sacrifice much for one's friends, Mr. Stainton; as it fortunately happens, I shall be all at liberty to-morrow morning. The spring is come upon us early. It will, I am sure, be delightful weather. If Mrs. Stainton will permit me the pleasure of driving her through the Bois——"

"Thank you," said Muriel. "You are very kind. I'll go."

Stainton looked perplexedly at his wife.

He did not, however, again broach the matter until they were safely in their own rooms at the hotel and were ready for bed.

"I hope you'll forgive me," he at last said.

"For what?"

"For getting you into that confounded engagement with young von Klausen. It was stupid of me. I don't know how I ever blundered into it." [Pg 253]

"It's of no consequence. I dare say I can stand him for once."

"Of course you can, dear. Still, I know how you dislike the Captain, and so I hope you'll pardon \_\_\_"

"Nonsense," yawned Muriel. "Don't think about it any more. And do turn out the light. I'm awfully sleepy."

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## XVI

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### IN THE BOIS

That little army of fashion which daily takes the air of the Bois rarely begins its invasion through the Porte Dauphine before mid-afternoon, and so the long, lofty avenues of what was once the Forêt de Rouvray and the Parc de St. Ouen were as yet almost deserted. Through the city streets and the Champs Elysées, Muriel and von Klausen had chatted in sporadic commonplaces, but when their open carriage, driven by a stolid coachman seated well ahead of his passengers, passed the Chinese Pavilions and turned to the left into the wide Route de Suresnes, a strained silence fell upon the pair. For fully ten minutes neither spoke, and then the horses slackened their pace upon the Carrefour du Bout des Lacs.

"Shall we walk?" asked von Klausen.

Muriel hesitated.

"Why?" she enquired.

"It is beautiful, the promenade here," explained von Klausen. "It is the most picturesque portion of the Bois, though none of the artificiality of the Bois well compares with the nature of my own country, which you have been good enough to visit." [Pg 255]

His words roused her antagonism. She experienced a perverse impulse to contradict him. She looked out at the Lac Inférieur, with its shaded banks and its twin islands, on one of which stood a little restaurant in imitation of a Swiss *chalet*. She was resolved to prefer this to his Austrian Tyrol, if for no better reason than that he claimed the Austrian Tyrol as his own.

"I like these woods better than your mountains," she declared.

"Better? But—why?"

"Your mountains are too lonely and fierce. These woods are pleasant and inviting."

"Good. We shall then accept their invitation," said von Klausen, smiling.

He leaped out and offered her his hand. Muriel, acknowledging herself fairly caught, lightly touched his hand and descended. The Captain turned to the driver.

"Meet us at the Cascade," he directed.

There was another moment of silence as they began their walk along the undisturbed path. Then the Austrian turned to his companion.

"I regret," he said, "that you are angry with me."

Muriel raised her fine dark brows. "I am not angry with you."

"Ah, yes, madame; you have been angry with me since we again met after your return from your visit to my country."

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"You are quite mistaken." She almost convinced herself while she said this, and her tone certainly should have carried conviction to her companion. "I assure you that you are entirely mistaken. Indeed, I have not been thinking much about you one way or the other."

"I am sorry," said von Klausen.

"That I am angry? But I tell you that I am not angry."

"That you have been so angry as to banish me from your mind altogether."

"Did you bring me here to tell me this?" asked Muriel.

"Yes."

She had scarcely expected him to acknowledge it. She glanced quickly at his blond, boyish face and saw that it was absolutely serene.

"How dared you?" she gasped.

"I dared do no less," he answered. "I could no longer bear being, for a reason unexplained, in the book of your displeasure. I had to know."

"Well, you shan't know."

"You judge me, dear lady, without giving the accused an opportunity to plead in his own defence?"

"You are not accused—and you aren't judged."

"I wish," said von Klausen, slowly, "that I could believe you; but how is that possible?"

"Do you mean to say that I am not telling you the truth?"

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"I mean, dear Mrs. Stainton, that I have no choice. You leave me none. Your words say one thing, but your tone, your manner, say another. To accept your truth in one of your expressions is to deny your truth in another of them."

Muriel bit her red under-lip.

"Let us go back," she said.

"I regret. The carriage has gone ahead."

They walked a few steps forward.

"You will, then, not explain?" he pleaded.

"I tell you there is nothing to explain. You are rude and you are presumptuous."

"Yet you have changed since our first acquaintance."

"You speak as if you had known me for a long time, Captain."

"For a short time I hoped that I knew you well."

"What nonsense!"

"Well enough it at least really was, for us to share a small secret, madame."

Muriel's eyes flashed.

"That is not fair!" she exclaimed. "You are referring to an incident that you know it is ungallant for you to mention."

Von Klausen bowed.

"Then I beg your pardon," he said; "but I insist that you forced me to the reference."

"I did not."

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"You required an explanation of my statement that we had once a close acquaintanceship."

"I required nothing—and, anyway, you presumed upon the incident. It was the merest trifle."

Von Klausen fixed his steady blue eyes upon her.

"It was," he said, slowly, "a trifle that you chose not to confide to your husband."

She drew back from him. Her gaze was hot with indignation; her dusky cheeks were aflame.



"How low of you!" she cried.

But von Klausen only smiled his young, careless smile.

"To mention the truth?" he murmured.

"To bring up such a trifle—to trade on such a confidence—to make of an impulsive action and of the consequences of that action—you know—I told you at the time, and you must know—that I didn't mention the circumstances to my husband merely because to mention it would have been to betray your terror of the fog, and I thought that, as a soldier, you would not want your terror known."

"Ah—so you did think of me, then?"

"I shall never think of you again, at any rate."

They were now half-way along the Lac Inférieur. Under the arching trees in their new spring green and through the silence of the sunlit spring morning, there came to them the music of the falling water from the Carrefour des Cascades. Von Klausen leaned toward his unwilling companion. His lithe figure trembled, his pink cheeks burned; in his blue eyes there gleamed a fire that had been too long repressed.

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"No!" he said, hoarsely. "You have thought of me since ever you touched my hand, Muriel, and you shall think of me always—think of me deeply. I cannot help what I say. I must say it. I must say it, and you must listen. I tell you now, once and forever—I tell you——"

Muriel felt only a torrent of emotions that she could in no wise understand. She was terribly angry; she was a little afraid; yet there was a fascination in this spectacle of a strong man with passions wholly unloosed—the first time that she had seen such a man so moved in spite of all the hampering harness of convention—and she was undeniably curious. Outraged, surprised, hurt, she nevertheless felt a certain sensation of flattery in her leaping heart: the not unsatisfactory knowledge that she had done this thing; that, in the last analysis, this soldier trained to discipline, this alien educated to respect marriage and to find beauty in the familiar types of his own land, had been goaded beyond endurance by her own body and soul into a rebellion against all his inherited traditions, into an overthrow of his inherent opinions. And beyond this, more vital than this, there was something else—something unguessed: the call of Youth to Youth, the demand of the young for the young, careless of racial difference, regardless of ancestral training, which, once unleashed, shatters every barrier of elaborately conceived convention.

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Education is, however, a force that must be reckoned with. Even at the last, it will have its word.

"Stop!" said Muriel.

Von Klausen did not heed. He put out his hands to seize her.

"No," he declared; "I will not stop. If I stopped, I should think. I do not care to think. Now I see only how beautiful you are; now I see only a young girl bound to a husband in whom the tide of life runs low and slowly; now——"

Yet that reference to Stainton, a reference so characteristically Continental, proved the blow that shattered, at least for that time, the Austrian's spell. It struck upon the armour of the American reverence for humdrum domesticity, and the armour bent its edge.

Muriel recovered herself. The image of her husband as her husband was evoked before her mental eye. Anger and horror rose uppermost in her soul—and close under them, no doubt, a subtle and powerful consciousness of shame at the only partly realised feelings of the moment before.

She raised a trembling hand.

"I hate you!" she cried. "I hate you! Jim is as young and as strong as ever you are, and if I were to tell him about this, he would—I believe he would kill you."

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Von Klausen smiled in ridicule or in disregard of such a suggestion; but the intense certainty of her tone had brought him to pause. His hands fell to his sides, and he stood before her breathing heavily.

"I once told you that I might be a coward in some things or before some phenomena of nature," he said, "and that may be; but I am afraid of no man that lives."

"You are afraid of this thing which you are doing," she answered: "afraid and ashamed."

"Not afraid."

"Ashamed, then." She softened, in spite of herself, as she looked at the splendid passion in his young face. "Ashamed of treating me in this way. Captain von Klausen, I love my husband."

It was simply said: so simply that it effected the desired result. Afterward, when he came to think it all over, he was by no means so deeply affected, but now, alone with her under the trees of that alley in the Bois, tossed in the surging trough of his immediate emotions, he did not, as he had said, care to think. He could, indeed, only feel, and the literal meaning of her words, he seemed in a flash to feel, was somehow inexplicably true.

Like a very echo to her words, he changed. His passion fell from him. His blue eyes softened. His entire aspect changed. A moment more and he was pleading forgiveness as earnestly as he had been pleading his love.

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Oddly enough, she now listened favourably. For her part, Muriel could not understand why she did it, and yet, before she realised what she was doing, she found herself excusing his offence. Perhaps this was only the result of that flattery, that pleasant knowledge of how her own beauty had caused this outbreak, which she had experienced when the outbreak began. Perhaps it was a softer and tenderer phrase in that Call of Youth which she had heard a few minutes earlier. Whatever the reason, regard his offence as she would, she could not regard his repentance unmoved.

"Don't; please don't say any more about it," she heard herself murmuring. "We will forget it. I am sorry—very sorry. We will never speak of it again—not to ourselves—and not to anybody else."

"But we shall be friends?" he asked.

"Wait," she said. They had reached the Cascade and the carriage was before them. She let him help her into it and she noticed that his manner in offering her his hand was not the manner in which his hand had previously been offered. As the carriage started forward: "You will never speak so to me again?" she asked, her eyes turned away toward a herd of deer that was feeding in the forest upon her side of the road.

When one is young such promises are lightly made.

"Never," he vowed.

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"And never," she kept it up, "refer in any way to anything about this affair to me?"

"Never again, dear lady."

"You should even stop thinking of me," she almost faltered, "in—in that way."

He pressed her hand ever so slightly.

"Ah," he said, "now you ask what my will cannot accomplish."

"But the thoughts are wrong."

"Yes, I understand that now. You have made me understand it. But I cannot sever from myself what has become a part of my mind; I can only master my tongue. Yet you need not fear me, nor need I fear myself. The good St. Augustine has said that we cannot control our desires, but he has not neglected to remind us that we can and must control our actions. I shall remember always his words."

She said nothing for awhile, but gradually he released her hand, and their talk, though still freighted with feeling, fell, or seemed to them to fall, upon trivial things.

"You did not stop in Marseilles?" he asked her, turning again to the subject of her fevered trip with Jim.

"We didn't get anywhere near it. I—we were in a hurry to get back to Paris. We—we thought it would be warmer in Paris."

"Warmer in Paris than Marseilles?"

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"Well, warmer in Paris than in the snowstorms that met us when we crossed the Austrian border into Italy and didn't stop until they had driven us out of Italy. We didn't think about Marseilles, and so we came right back here."

"You were not far from Marseilles. It is a pity that you did not see it. It is one of the cities in France the most worth seeing. All the world goes there: Chinamen, Moors, Oriental priests and Malay sailors. You sit at a table before one of the cafés, of an evening in summer or of a Sunday afternoon in winter, anywhere along the Cannebière or the rue Noailles. I should much like to show you Marseilles sometime—you and your husband."

"Sometime, perhaps," said Muriel, "we shall go there, Mr. Stainton and I."

"But the best of Marseilles," pursued von Klausen, "is thirty miles and more away: a place that tourists miss and that only a few devout persons seem really to know. I mean the Sainte Baume."

She had never heard of it; and at once he began singing its praises.

"It is," he said, "a place that should be shrine for every soul that has sinned the sins of the flesh. It is on a plateau—the particular point that I mean—a plateau of precipitous mountains. Upon this plateau are set more mountains, and one of these, the highest, a sheer cliff, rises almost to the clouds. Nearly at its top, a precipice below and a precipice above, there is a great cave converted into a chapel. That cave is the grotto where the Sainte Marie Magdelène spent, in penance, the last thirty years of her life."

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He stopped, his last sentence ending in an awed whisper.

Muriel was not unmoved by his reverence.

"You have been there, then?" she asked.

"Long, long ago," he answered, "as a boy. But now, when my heart hungers and my soul is tired, I dream of that spot—the silent chapel; the long, fertile plateau, which seems a world away; the snow-capped mountains to the northward; the faint tinkle of the distant sheep-bells from below, and the memory of her that sinned and repented and was saved."

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## XVII

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### THE CALL OF YOUTH

That evening there came the beginning of the end.

The next day was to be Mid-Lent, and the entire city throbbed with preparation; the pagan city of Paris, which is ever eager to celebrate any sort of fête of any sort of faith. All the gay thousands that had not observed the fast panted for the feast, and that night, so von Klausen had promised his two American friends, the *grand boulevard* would be crowded from curb to curb and from the Porte St. Martin to the Madeleine.

"You must really see it," he said, for he had returned to the hotel with Muriel and had there met Stainton, who straightway invited him to luncheon in celebration of the concluding formalities of the sale. "The streets will be as deep as to the knee with confetti, and there will be masks. It is one of the annual things worth while."

He was eating a salad as unconcernedly as if his morning had been one of the dull routine of the Embassy.

Muriel looked at him in surprise at his ease of manner. For her own part, though she told herself religiously that she had done no wrong, she was singularly ill at ease. Her greeting, when Stainton had met and kissed her, was perfunctory, and, ever since, her bearing had been preoccupied. She gave but half an ear to her husband's long enthusiasm over the termination of his business with the syndicate, and now, as she glanced from von Klausen to Jim, she saw that the latter was tired.

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"You look tired," she said. Another would have said that he looked old.

"Not at all," said Stainton. "I am feeling splendidly." His attention had been caught and his curiosity excited by von Klausen's description of the evening before the fête. If he felt somewhat worn from the now unaccustomed strain of business, he was all the more ready to welcome this chance for novel amusement.

"Good," he went on to the Austrian. "We shall see it. Won't you be our pilot, Captain?"

Von Klausen glanced at Muriel.

"If," he said, "you will do me the honour—you and Mrs. Stainton—to dine with me. We might early take a car across the river to the Foyot and then run back in plenty of time to make the promenade of the boulevards. That is to say," he added deferentially, but with no alteration of expression, "if Mrs. Stainton is not too weary because of her drive this morning?"

Jim, too, looked at Muriel.

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"I am not tired," said she. Her tone was as conventional as the Austrian's.

Von Klausen turned to regard Stainton closely.

"But you, sir," he said, "are you sure that you are not tired? This juggle with fortunes is what you call heroic."

"Not at all, thanks. There was nothing but a great deal of talk and the signing of a few papers." Jim squared his broad shoulders, though the movement started a yawn that he was barely able to stifle. "Not at all." He began to resent this solicitude. "I am as fit as ever."

"Perhaps," persisted von Klausen, "should you take a brief rest during the remainder of the afternoon——"

"No, no." It was Muriel who interrupted. For a reason that she did not stop to analyse she was suddenly unwilling either to be left alone with her husband or to be deprived of his company. She did not yet wish to face Jim in their own rooms, and she did not wish to face her own thoughts. "No," she repeated, speaking rapidly and saying she scarcely knew what. "The day has begun so splendidly that it would be a shame to waste any of it by napping. I'm sure we should miss something glorious if we napped. I'm not a bit tired, and Jim is looking fresher every minute. You *are* sure you're not tired, aren't you, Jim?"

Von Klausen shrugged his shoulders.

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"As Mrs. Stainton wishes," he said, "We might pass the afternoon by motoring to Versailles and back."

So they spent the afternoon in an automobile and came back to town in time for dinner at the famous restaurant close by the Odéon and dined on *croûte consommé*, *filet* of cod, and *canard sauvage à la presse*. After von Klausen had paid the bill, Stainton, who felt more tired than he had expected to feel, ordered another bottle of burgundy.

When they crossed the river by the Pont de la Concorde and turned from the rue Royale into the boulevards, the crowd that von Klausen had predicted, already possessed the broad streets. It surged from house-wall to house-wall; it shouted and danced and blew tin horns and threw confetti; it stopped the crawling taxicabs and was altogether as riotously happy as only a fête-day crowd in Paris can be.

Von Klausen and his party dismissed their motor at the corner of the rue Vignon and plunged afoot into the midst of the swaying mass of merrymakers. Amid shrill whistles, loud laughter, and showers of confetti that almost blinded them, they made their way nearly to the rue Scribe. Then, suddenly, Muriel and von Klausen realised that Stainton was lost.

They called, but their voices merged in the general clatter. They stood on tiptoe and strained their eyes. They thought now that they saw him on this side, and again they saw him on that; but, though they shouldered their way, the Austrian vigorously making a path, hither and yon, and though they knew that somewhere, probably only a few yards away, Stainton was making corresponding efforts to discover their whereabouts, he eluded them as if he had been a will-o'-the-wisp.

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Tired at last by the long day and its emotions, jostled by the fête-makers, and frightened by the disappearance of her husband, Muriel began quietly to cry. The Austrian at once noticed.

"Do not alarm yourself, dear lady," he said—and, as he had to bend to her to get the words to her ear among the tumult, his cheek brushed a loose strand of her dark hair—"pray do not alarm yourself. We shall find him soon, or he will await us when we return to your hotel."

"We can never find him here!" Muriel declared. She had been obliged, in order not to lose her fellow-searcher, to cling to his arm, and her fingers fastened as convulsively about it as the hands of a drowning man grasp the floating log for rescue. "He'll know that, and I'm sure he'll go at once to the hotel. Let's go there ourselves—at once—at once! Call a cab."

Not a cab, however, was in sight, and this von Klausen explained to her, bending to her ear.

"We must walk," he said. "It is not so far—if you are not too tired?"

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"No, no, I'm not too tired—or I won't be if we can only hurry."

They started slowly, by necessity, on their way.

"But I am sorry," said von Klausen, "that you are afraid. You are afraid—of me?"

His tone was hurt. She looked up at him impulsively and saw genuine sorrow in his bright eyes. They were very young eyes.

"Oh, no," she said, "not of you. I know you wouldn't—"

"Yet," he interrupted, "you were a little afraid of me, I think, this morning."

"*Not afraid*—even then. And now—well, I remember the talk we had afterward. I hope you haven't forgotten it."

Again his lips were near her neck.

"I shall never forget it," he vowed.

Something in his voice made her sure that he had not interpreted her words as she had intended them to be interpreted. Nevertheless, she dared not resume a subject that could be safe only while it was closed. She said no more, and von Klausen was almost equally silent until they had reached the hotel.

"Has Mr. Stainton returned?" asked Muriel of the first servant that they met.

The servant thought not.

"Ask at the *bureau*."

Stainton had not yet come back.

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"He will certainly follow us very shortly," said von Klausen. "It may be better that we await him in your sitting-room."

Muriel had been expecting either that Stainton would have reached the hotel before them or that her companion would leave her at the door. Now a new difficulty presented itself. It is one of the curses of our minor errors—perhaps the greatest—that they inspire us with the fear that the persons about us may be suspecting us of worse offences. Muriel had never before considered what the people of the hotel might think of her. She was conscious, moreover, of having done nothing further than withhold from her husband the narrative of what most women of the world would consider nothing more than an amusing flirtation; yet now, with the remembrance of that scene in the Bois vividly in her mind, she became immediately certain that the servants regarded

with lifted eyebrows this wife who had returned without her husband at an hour not precisely early? To dismiss von Klausen in the hallway would, her method of logic twisted for her, confirm any suspicions that might have been roused.

"Yes," she agreed quietly, "we'll go upstairs." She turned to the servant at the door. "When my husband comes in," she told him, "you will say that Captain von Klausen and I are awaiting him in my—in the sitting-room of the suite that my husband and I occupy."

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For a reason that neither could have explained they did not speak on their way to the room, and, after they had entered it, von Klausen shutting the door behind them and switching on the electric light, this silence continued until it became almost committal. Muriel laid off her wraps and sank into a wide chair at some distance from the window. It was she that was first to speak. She spoke, however, with an effort, and she sought refuge in platitude.

"I am tired," she said; and then, as von Klausen did not reply, she added: "Yes, after all, I find that I am very tired."

"It has been," said the Austrian, "a difficult day for you."

There was again silence. He stood before her, slim, erect, more boyish than ever, his face, none the less, rather pale and set, and his eyes narrowed.

"I wonder what can have happened to Jim," she at last managed to say.

"Only what has happened to us. He—I think he will be here soon."

Von Klausen was looking at her. She wished that he would not do that. She wished that there would be an end to these interruptions of silence. She wished devoutly that Jim would return.

"It—it is rather close here," she said.

"Do you think it close?" he responded. He did not take his narrowed eyes from her. He did not move.

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"Yes," she answered. "Will you—will you be so good as to open the window?"

He bowed as gravely as if she had required of him a mighty sacrifice, and he turned to the window.

The long velvet curtains were pulled together, and he did not attempt to draw them from the glass. Instead, he simply slipped his arm between them. Then something went wrong with the knob that controls the bolt. He shook the knob. His hand slipped and went through the pane. There was a tinkle of falling glass.

Startled by the sound Muriel rose quickly to her feet.

"What is it?" she asked.

She took an involuntary step forward. Then she saw that von Klausen was trying to conceal from her his right hand, red with blood.

"You are hurt?" she cried.

Her swarthy cheek whitened. There was a swift catch in her throat.

"It is nothing," he answered. "The window is open."

The window was indeed open. The curtain, however, remained drawn.

"But you are hurt!" repeated Muriel.

She put out her hand and seized his own with a slight gash across the knuckles—a gash from which a little of the blood flowed over her white fingers and marked them with a bright stain.

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That handclasp finished what the spring sunshine of the morning had begun. She stood there, swaying a little, her lithe body still immature; the electric light from overhead falling directly upon her blue-black hair and level brows; her damp red lips parted; her face white, but warm and dusky, and her great dark eyes wide, half-terrified, seeing things they had never seen before.

Von Klausen's boyish face glowed. His blue gaze sparkled as if with electric fire. His wounded hand closed about her fingers.

The circuit was complete.

"I love you!" he whispered, and he took her in his arms.

From somewhere, somewhere that seemed far, far away, Muriel heard a voice that answered him and knew that it was her own voice:

"I love you!"

She clung to him; she held him fast. She knew. It was a knowledge beyond reason. There was no need to reason why these things should be so, when they were. She was aware only that in the kisses falling upon her lips, in the hands holding her tight, in the heart pounding against her breast there was a power that she missed in Stainton: a power that answered to the force in her

own true being.

"But—but it can't be! It can't be!" she sobbed.

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Von Klausen kissed her again: the long, long kiss of youth and love.

"But Jim—you don't know him. I can't hurt him. He is too good. He is far, far too good for either of us."

Von Klausen's reply was another kiss, but this time a light, an almost merry kiss.

"He need never know," said the Austrian.

She leaped from his arms. She sprang a yard away. Her face went rigid.

"You—you——" she said. "What do you mean? I tell you that I could never ask Jim to divorce me, and you say that he needn't know!"

It was the Austrian who was amazed now. He was frankly at sea.

"Divorce?" he echoed. "Who spoke of divorce?"

"Go!"

Muriel's face was crimson. She drew herself to her full height. She pointed to the door. Her finger shook with anger; her eyes shone with hate and shame.

"Go!"

"But what does this mean? I love you. You love me. Yet you tell me go."

"Love?" The word seemed to sicken her. "Love? You don't know what the word means. You don't know! You don't know!" She passed her hand across her face. "Oh, leave here!" she cried. "Leave here at once!"

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"But, Muriel——"

"Go!" She moved to the call-button in the wall. "At once, or I'll ring for the servants."

"Muriel——"

"Don't speak! Don't dare to say another word to me! If you speak again, I'll ring."

He raised his arms once more and looked at her. What he observed gave him no explanation and no comfort. His arms fell to his slim sides. He shrugged his shoulders, picked up his hat and coat, and left the room.

Drawing back from his passing figure as if his touch were contamination, Muriel waited until he had gone. She closed the door behind him; tried to bolt it; remembered that it secured itself by a spring lock which only a key could open from the hall; then, almost in a faint, fell into the wide arm-chair where she had sat when she sent von Klausen to the window.

Stainton opened the door fifteen minutes later. He was fatigued from his day and haggard from his solitary confetti-beaten walk along the boulevards. He saw her nearly recumbent before him, limp and pale.

"Muriel!" he cried.

She opened her heavy eyes.

"Jim!"

He hurried to her, knelt beside her. He stroked her hair as a father strokes the hair of his weary child.

"My poor little girl!" he said.

Had she thought at all coherently about his coming, she had not meant to suffer his caresses until she had told him something of what had occurred. But, before she found time to begin a narrative of the truth, or the half truth, he began to pet her. She could not confess to him while he did that.

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"I thought you were lost," she said. "We looked, but couldn't find you anywhere. I thought you might have been run over. I thought—I hardly know what I thought."

"My dear little girl!" he murmured. He patted her left hand. He reached for its fellow. "Why," he cried, "you've hurt yourself!"

Muriel started.

"No, no!" she said. "It's nothing. Truly, it's nothing. It's——" She laughed shrilly. "I asked Captain von Klausen to open the window. It stuck—the window, I mean. He put his hand through the glass and cut his wrist. I bandaged it. I scratched myself when I picked up some of the pieces from the floor."

She realised that she had gone too far to retreat. She had lied again to her husband, and for no adequate reason. She had crossed the Rubicon of marital ethics.

After that she was committed to silence. Every endeavour she made to draw back involved her in a new ambush, brought her to a new maze of deception. Truth became impossible.

She wanted to tell the truth. The more impossible it became, the more bitterly she wanted to tell it. She hated von Klausen. She was sure that she had never loved her husband as she loved him now. The fact that her relations with the Austrian had begun and ended with a mere declaration of love did not, in her eyes, lessen the sin; the fact that von Klausen had misunderstood her attitude and had himself assumed an attitude far below that which she had at first expected, increased her antipathy against her lover and heightened her affection—call it love as she would, it would now be no more than affection—for Jim. She wanted to tell him, but every lapsing moment laid a new stone upon the wall that barred her way.

She sat down in a chair before him and put her face in her hands.

"Jim," she said in a low voice, "I am not going to have a baby."

At first he did not understand her. He thought that the sight of blood had shaken her nerves and that she was recurring to the distaste for motherhood that she had expressed to him in Aiken.

"Don't worry, dearie," he said. "It can't be helped now, but there is really no reason for you to worry."

She did not look up, but she shook her head.

"I am not," she repeated.

He came to her, stood before her, and patted a little patch of her cheek, which her hands left bare.

"There, there," he said.

At his touch she broke into convulsive sobbing.

"You don't understand me," she sobbed. "It is over. It is all over."

He withdrew his hand quickly; he caught his breath.

"What—what——" he stammered.

"O, Jim!" she cried.

"Muriel," he besought her, "tell me. What—how? When? You don't mean——"

"Yes, yes," she moaned, her hands still tight before her face.

Stainton stood erect. He clenched his fists in an effort to control himself. He pleaded to his ears that they had not heard correctly; his reason declared that, if his ears had heard aright, this was the fancy of an ailing woman; but his frame trembled, and his voice shook as he began again:

"You don't mean——"

"I do, I do. Oh, let me alone! Don't ask me any more!"

He had built for years upon his desire for physical immortality. Now the edifice that he had reared was shattered, and Stainton shook with its fall. He clutched the back of a frail chair that stood opposite Muriel's. Perceptibly he swayed.

"When?" he whispered out of dry lips. His mouth worked; his iron-grey brows fought their way to a meeting. "When?"

Her head sank lower in her hands.

"While you were at Lyons," she said. "The very day you left."

"Is that why you didn't go to the Boussingaults'?"

"I suppose so."

"You suppose?" Almost anger shot from his eyes. "Don't you know? You must know! How did this happen?"

Muriel's head nearly rested on her knees; her shoulders twitched. Her only reply was an inarticulate noise that seemed to tear itself from her breast.

"Answer me!" he demanded.

She rose and stumbled a few steps toward him. She held out her arms. Her face was like a sheet, and her eyes and mouth were like holes burnt into a sheet.

"I fell," she mumbled, and her words seemed to strike him. "I went for a drive. Coming back—here at the hotel—I fell from the cab—getting out. I got up to the bedroom. And it happened. I sent for a doctor—*not* Boussingault. He treated me, and I paid him. The nurse, too. They said it was easy—They said I would be all right in a week.—I thought I was—But I have suffered—O, Jim, Jim! Don't look like that! Don't, please, think——"

She crashed to the floor at his feet.

Then Stainton realised something of the bodily agony that had been hers while he was absent and of the mental agony that had driven her on their mad dash through Switzerland to Austria and Italy, the mental agony that lashed her now. He put aside, for the moment, his own suffering. He stooped and took her up and held her in his arms and, pressing her head against his breast and holding her sobbing body tight to his, tried to murmur broken, unthought words of comfort.

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Gradually, very gradually, she grew a little quieter.

"My dear, my dear," he said in a voice so hoarse that he scarcely knew it for his own, "why did you keep torturing yourself? You should have had rest, and instead—Why didn't you tell me? Why?"

"I was afraid," she said, simply.

"Dearie!" he cried. "Of me?"

Her words were a fresh stab.

"Yes. I knew how much you wanted—And I was afraid."

"You needn't have been. You see it now. You needn't have been. Tell me what I can do for you, dear. Only tell me."

"Take me away from Paris!" sobbed Muriel. "I have come to hate the place. I can't stand it another day. I can't stand it. Some other time, perhaps—Only now—oh, take me away!"

"We'll go home, Muriel," he said. "We'll sail by the first boat. Back to our own country. Back home."

But at that she shuddered.

"That would be worse," she said, rapidly. "It would be worse even than Paris. Don't you see? We left there happy, expecting—Not there. No, I couldn't bear that."

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Stainton had put her on a chair and was kneeling beside her, stroking her hair and wrists. His fingers touched the dried blood on her hand, brown and horrible. But he kissed the blood.

She drew the hand from him.

"Your poor little hand!" said Jim. "Let me see the cut."

"It is—there is nothing to be seen. It was only a scratch. Let's talk about getting away."

"I thought," said Stainton, "that you wanted to come back here when we were in Italy."

"I did," she faltered. "It seemed there that it would be easier to tell you here, where it happened. But to-night scared me."

"To-night? Why to-night, dearest? Not what has just happened? Not anything I have said about it?"

"Not that. I don't know. Something before that—"

"Because you lost me in the crowd?"

"Yes, yes: because I lost you. Because I lost you for that hour on the boulevards. I don't like Paris any more. I'm afraid of Paris. I—I don't like the confetti. Let's go away, Jim. Please."

He wished that she would go back to New York. He argued for them both that the return would be wise. When something terrible has occurred in unfamiliar surroundings, if one reverts to surroundings that are familiar, it is often possible to forget the terror, or, if it must be remembered, to remember it with pangs that are less acute than those which one suffers on the scene of the occurrence.

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New York, however, she would not hear of. Not yet, she said. They would do better, now, to go to some place that would be different from Paris and different from New York.

"We'll go to Marseilles," she said.

She spoke without much consideration. The name of Marseilles happened to be lying at the top of the names of cities in the back of her mind. It was merely readiest to hand. She did not care. She cared only that her effort to tell the truth had ended in more falsehood.

The next morning they left for Marseilles.

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## XVIII

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### OUR LADY OF PROTECTION

For their first night in the new city they stopped at a minor hotel, because they were tired out by their dusty ride and turned naturally to the nearest resting-place that presented itself. The



service, however, was poor, and their room close and hot. Muriel slept badly; she turned and tossed the whole night long. They decided to go, next day, to the Grand Hôtel du Louvre et de la Paix; but they began the morning by taking a drive along the Corniche, and there, on the white, curving road beside the blue water, which seemed to them the bluest water they had ever seen, they chanced upon a little villa that bore a sign announcing that this miniature house was to be let, furnished.

"Let's take it," said Muriel.

She was captivated by the beauty of the view, and she was weary of hotels.

"We may have only a short time in France," Jim cautioned her. "We may want to be getting back home when—when all's well again."

"They will surely be willing to rent it for a short time if we are willing to pay them a little more than they would ask on a long lease," Muriel serenely assured him.

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Her prophecy proved correct, and they took the house. It was indeed a small house, but comfortable, and its new occupants found nothing in it to complain of. Muriel secured servants, and the Staintons moved in at once.

They were satisfied. Stainton was still showing the effects of their rush through Switzerland and Austria; he was showing, as a matter of fact, his age. Rugged he was and well-kept, and not, as the life of business-adventurers go, an old man; he was nevertheless not young for the career of emotion. He needed quiet, he required routine. As for Muriel, feverish because she was young indeed, and more feverish because she was trying to forget many things that a perverse memory refused to banish, she discovered that when she made concessions to domesticity, to which she was, nevertheless, unused, she became the prey to her own reflections and to her husband's too solicitous inquiry and care. It annoyed her that, at night, he saw that the covers were well over her shoulders; it annoyed her that he should tell her that beef would put roses into her cheeks; she did not want the covers about her shoulders and she did not like beef. Yet, though she still hungered for excitement, even she was glad of an interval for recuperation, and she was heartily sorry for Jim.

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It was in one of these moments of her sorrow for him that he ventured to press once more the question of their return to New York. They were sitting on the balcony that opened from the first-floor windows of their villa, and were looking over the blue bay.

"Don't you think," he asked, "that we might get back next month?"

His tone was almost plaintive. In a child or a woman she would have thought it plaintive. She did not want to go back; she wanted never to see New York again, but she was touched by his appeal.

"Perhaps," she granted.

On the third morning of their stay, they drove into town and then out the rue de Rome and across the rue Dragon to the foot of the great hill on the top of which rises, from its ancient foundation, the modern monstrosity called Notre Dame de la Garde. They ascended in the open elevator the high cliff that fronts the rue Cherchell; then they climbed the broken flights of steps that lead to the church on the dome of which stands a gigantic, gilded figure of the Virgin.

The neo-Byzantine interior was cool and still, and they wandered for a quarter of an hour about the place, looking at the crude pictures of storm-tossed ships, the offerings of sailors saved from the clutches of the sea by their prayers to Our Lady of Rescue; at the models of other ships, similarly saved, suspended by cords from the golden ceiling; at the little tiles, from floor to roof, bearing testimony to prayers answered or to the making of other prayers.

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"We have prayed; we have waited; we have hoped," read Muriel, stopping before a small oblong of marble. "I wonder what it was," she mused, "that these people wanted."

Stainton had seated himself in a nearby chair.

"I don't know," he said; "but I hope they got it at last."

His words, lightly spoken, seemed cruel to her.

"Let's go outside," she answered, "and look at the view."

"Why hurry?" complained her husband. "It's so cool and comfortable in here."

"There must be a breeze on the terrace. There must always be a breeze out there."

"Well, run along. I'll follow in a few minutes. I want a rest."

Muriel's lips tightened.

"Very well," she said.

She went out to the walled walk that surrounds the church and strolled to the side overlooking the bay.

Far below her, shimmering in the heat, stretched the city, like a panting dog at rest. To the right, across the forest of minor shipping in the *vieux port*, to the rue Clary and the Gare Maritime, the

massed houses of the Old Town stood grim and grey. Directly before her, from the foot of the wall and for miles to the left, across the Cité Chabas and the Quartier St. Lambert, to Roucas-Blanc and beyond to Rond Point, where the Prado meets the sea, the hills fell away to the water in terraces of cypress and olive trees and pomegranates in blossom. From dark green to white the foliage waved in a pleasant breeze. The villas on the slopes shone pink in the sun. The sky was of a most intense blue; the lapping waves of the bay mirrored the sky, and in the midst of the waves, among its rocky sister islands, rose the castellated strip of land where towers the Château d'If.

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She leaned upon the parapet and looked out to the distant horizon. The breeze rose and ruffled those strands of her dark hair that had fallen below her wide hat. She was thinking of another landscape—of a landscape of which she had only heard:

"The silent chapel; the long, fertile plateau that seems a world away; the snow-capped mountains to the northward; the faint tinkle of the distant sheep-bells, and the memory of her that sinned and repented and was saved."

"Muriel!"

It was von Klausen; but not the gay von Klausen that she had known and had come to fear. His face was drawn; his eyes grave; his manner serious.

"How did you come here?"

The question escaped her before she had time to fall back upon her weapons of defence.

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"It was very simple," he answered. "I called at your hotel the morning after you departed—because I had to see you, whether you wished me or not. They said you were gone. I asked for your forwarding address, and they told me Marseilles. I came here; I searched the hotels; at your hotel the porter told me that your trunks had been carted to a villa on the Corniche. I went to the villa. The maid said that you had come here."

His explanation was long enough to give her a chance to regain her poise.

"How dared you come?" she asked.

"Wait until you have heard what I have to say," he replied.

"There is nothing you can say that will change the situation."

"Hear me first, Muriel, and you will understand."

"I won't listen. I don't like you, and I won't listen!"

"You must." He came nearer to her.

"What do you suppose my husband will say when he finds you here?" she demanded. "He is in the church now; he will be out in a moment."

"I suppose that he will say that he is glad to see me. I am sure that you have told him nothing."

She eyed him menacingly.

"Are you so sure of that?"

"Absolutely," he replied. "But it makes no difference if you have told him all that there is to tell, everything. I am not afraid."

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"Then you do not think of what I may be afraid? You do not consider me?—But of course you don't!"

"You have not told him. If you had, I should not say to you what I have come to say—perhaps. I should be discreet, because I could not bear that I should cause you annoyance—"

"You annoy me now."

"But if you have not told him—Well, what I have to say is my excuse. If he is in the church, that is the more reason that I should make haste in saying it."

He moved still nearer.

"I have told him," she said.

"No."

"Go away," said Muriel, but the menace had faded from her large eyes, her tone had ceased to challenge and begun to plead.

"In one moment, if he does not come out and detain me, I shall go," said von Klausen; "but now I must speak. I went to your hotel in Paris to tell you this; I have travelled here to tell you. I will not be denied. I have the right. It is only this, the thing that I am come to say: I have learned the truth about myself and about our relations. Then I was in the power of something so new that I did not understand it. Now I know. I knew so soon as I left you that last evening, and the absence from you has taught me over and over the same lesson. I love you. No, do not draw away. When I told you in Paris that I loved you, I used that word 'love' in the basest of its senses; but now—now, *ach*, I know I love you truly; that I honour and adore you; that I hold you as sacred as the

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holy angels. I came only to tell you this and put myself right in your dear eyes; and you must see now that to love you thus truly is my punishment—for I have once approached foully something holy to me, and I know that, even could you care for me and forgive me, I should still be hopeless."

She tried to doubt his sincerity, but she could not. Her hand, though it rested on the warm parapet, shook as if she were trembling from the cold.

"Hopeless?" she repeated.

"You are married," he answered. "Nothing can alter that, for in the eyes of my religion nothing but death can separate you from your husband."

She remembered her teaching in the convent school.

"You came here to tell me this?" she asked.

"I came to tell you this and to ask if, though it will change no fact, you can forgive me for what I said in Paris."

She raised her eyes to answer. As she did so she saw Stainton turning the corner of the promenade.

"Here he is!" she whispered. "You are right: I didn't tell him anything. Wait. There will be another chance for us: I must have one word alone with you before—before——" [Pg 293]

"Before," concluded von Klausen, "we say good-bye for the rest of our lives."

The Austrian had not been wrong; Stainton came up smiling.

"Think of you running into us down here!" he said. "I'm glad to see you." He invited the Captain to dinner, and the Captain, after a furtive glance at Muriel, accepted the invitation.

Nor was the dinner unsuccessful. Muriel, resolutely shutting her mind to the thought of so soon losing von Klausen, yet salving her conscience with the brief reflection that, as no positive wrong had been done, so the future was to be clean even of temptation, was almost happy. The Austrian, it is true, was somewhat silent; but Jim held himself altogether at the best.

"The fact is," he explained to von Klausen, "I believe that I've been homesick for a long time without knowing."

"And now," asked the Captain, looking about the pleasant little dining-room, "you have a home, yes?"

"Not here," said Jim. "Not anywhere, in fact; but we soon shall have one. I was not referring to this place. It is all right enough, but we are here only for a few weeks. When I said 'home,' I meant the city that both my wife and I regard as home. I meant New York." [Pg 294]

"Then you are returning soon?"

"Three weeks from to-day."

Muriel looked at Jim.

"Is not this a sudden decision?" the guest inquired.

"Not at all. Muriel and I talked it over the other day and quite agreed, didn't we, dear?"

She tried to say "yes," but, though her lips moved, she was mute. She could only nod.

"Mrs. Stainton," said von Klausen, looking narrowly at Muriel, "did not mention it to me when we met to-day."

"How did that happen, dear?" asked Jim. His eyes met hers. He smiled pleasantly. "You must have forgotten."

She wanted to ask him how he had taken her qualified assent to a departure a month hence to be an expression of willingness to sail in three weeks, but there seemed to be something underlying his obvious manner that made her wish to hide her surprise. She wondered if there were anything underlying his manner; she wondered if what troubled her were not the sense of her deception of him.

"I forgot," she said.

"I booked by telephone just fifteen minutes ago while you were dressing, my dear," said Stainton, "and when I was rude enough to leave the Captain for a few minutes with his *dubonais*. We have an outside stateroom on the upper deck of the *Prinzess Wilhelmina*, and we sail from Genoa." [Pg 295]

He fell to talking of what he had heard of the advantages of the southern route for the return journey to America. Presently he produced another surprise.

"By the way, Captain," he said, "do you know anything about the trains to Lyons? I shall have to run up there to-morrow. I can't get back here until the next day, but I want to start as early as possible."

This time Muriel felt herself forced to speak.

"Why, Jim," said she, "you never mentioned this to me."

"Didn't I?" he said. "That's curious. Or, no, come to think of it, it's not curious, for the letter was waiting for me when we came in, and you had to to run right off to dress, you know."

"Why must you go?"

"Those French purchasers again."

"I thought you were through with them."

"So did I, my dear; but, you see, they have just discovered that they have bought the mine without the machinery, and they're angry because I wrote to them and fixed a price on that."

"You don't mean that you tricked them?"

"Certainly not. I mean only that they do not understand American ways of doing business."

"You didn't say you had written them."

"My dear, when do I bore you with business affairs?" Stinton turned to von Klausen. "I hate to leave the little girl alone," he said. "But perhaps you will be good enough to look in on her here to-morrow evening and see that she is not too much depressed." [Pg 296]

Muriel tried to catch the Austrian's eye, but Jim's eye had immediately shifted to her, and von Klausen promised. She wanted to ask him where he was stopping, for she feared his coming to the house when she was alone there; she wanted to see him, but she wanted to see him in the open, and she wanted to get a note to him to tell him not to come to the house. Yet she felt her fears growing; she was afraid to put her question, and the Austrian left without naming his hotel.

When the door closed on him, Jim continued to talk much about nothing, although he had lately been more than commonly silent in her company. She bore it as long as she could. Then she asked:

"Why are you going away to-morrow?"

Jim was surprised.

"For what reason in the world but the one I have just given?"

"Then I think you might have told me when *he* wasn't here."

"My dear, you gave me no chance."

"And you booked passage back, Jim?"

"Passage home, yes." [Pg 297]

Muriel's mouth drooped.

"Oh, I loathe New York!" she said.

He came to her and took both her hands. His grave eyes looked searchingly into hers.

"Won't you think about me," he asked, "a little?"

"I know, Jim, but I never promised——"

"I have tried to deserve consideration, Muriel."

He had been kind. She reflected that he had been as kind as he knew how to be. She felt ashamed of her selfishness, and she felt, too, that, within a few hours, it would matter little to her whether she lived in France or America.

"You're right," she said. "Forgive me. It's very late. You say you want to leave early. We had better go to bed."

She thought it strange that he had not asked her to go with him to Lyons, for she remembered his vow never to leave her alone again. Yet she knew that, had he asked her to go with him, thus breaking his rule never to bring her into touch with business, she would have regarded that as a sign that he was suspicious. So she lay awake and was silent, and in the morning accompanied him up the hill to the station and watched him climb aboard his train.

She spent the entire day in a restless waiting for the night. She tried to think of some way to get word to von Klausen and could think of none. As the evening came and darkened, she became more and more afraid. When nine o'clock followed eight, she grew afraid of something else: she grew afraid that the Austrian would not keep his appointment. She welcomed him in an almost hysterical manner when, at half-past nine, he was shown into her drawing-room. [Pg 298]

"You shouldn't," she said—"you shouldn't have come!"

Von Klausen was in the evening clothes of a civilian. He looked young and handsome.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because of Jim."

"He invited me."

"Yes, I know, but—" She clasped her fingers before her and knitted her fingers.

"But what now?" pressed von Klausen. "See: you give no reason."

"He was queer. His manner—I don't know. Only I had not promised to go home in three weeks."

"No?"

"He had said a month, and I had said 'Perhaps.'"

Von Klausen smiled.

"We men interpret as 'Yes' a lady's 'Perhaps.'"

"Not Jim. And he hadn't told me that he wrote to those people in Lyons and asked them if they weren't going to buy the machinery."

"Why should he? In your country husbands do not tell their wives of business. I know that; surely you should know it better."

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"That business wasn't like him."

"It was very—shrewd. My dear Muriel, you must not thus vex yourself. Why should I not be here? What wrong do I? Besides, the American married man is not jealous. I have heard of one in Washington who found his wife in his friend's arms and said only, 'Naughty, naughty! Flirting once more!'"

She smiled at that and let him quiet her. When he reminded her that this was to be their farewell she was quieted altogether. She sat on a sofa, the only light, that of a distant lamp, softly enveloping her bare shoulders and warm neck; and she allowed him to sit beside her there.

The room was small and panelled in white, with empty sconces along the walls and parquet floor covered with oriental rugs. The door was half hidden in shadow. Both felt that in this stage they were about to say good-bye forever.

Von Klausen, by the battlements of the promenade at Notre Dame de la Garde, had spoken the truth. He was deeply in love. He was truly in love for the first and last time in his life; and because animal passion had asserted itself in Paris, and because that passion seemed to be the characteristic of those butterfly affairs that had preceded this love for Muriel, he now repudiated it, or at least repressed it, altogether. This love was a holy thing to him, and so much of it as he could not have with the sanction of holy authority he would not now attempt at all to secure. The fact of his previous relations with other women, and of his once having looked upon Muriel with the same eyes with which he had looked upon those others, made it impossible for him now to do more than kneel before her in an agony of renunciation and farewell as one might kneel at the shrine of some virginal goddess before starting upon a lifelong journey into the countries where that goddess is unknown.

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They had talked for hours before he so much as touched her hand; yet Muriel had her moments of frank rebellion.

"If you saw things as I do," she said, "you would see that what we now think of as so right might end by being very wrong."

"Nothing," he answered, "can be wrong that religion has decreed to be right."

"Not the ruin of our lives?"

"When the saving of our happiness involves the wreck of your husband's—"

"Do I help him by giving you up and living on with him when I don't honestly love him? Can't you see what I mean? I am fond of Jim; he is good and kind and brave; but somehow—I don't know why: I don't know why, but, oh, I can't love him! I even understand now that I never did love him."

"Nevertheless, you are married to him."

"Yes; but is a divorce wrong when—"

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"A divorce is always wrong."

"Your church didn't perform the marriage, why should it consider the marriage a real one?"

"Because it has decreed that a true marriage according to the rite of any faith is binding."

"But marriage is a contract."

"Marriage is a sacrament."

They would get so far—always darting down this byway and that of casuistry, only to find that the ways were blind alleys ending against the impregnable wall of arbitrary custom—and then she would come back to his point of view. She would come back with tears, which made her great

eyes so lovely that he could only just restrain himself from taking her into his arms; and she would brush away the tears and smile, and, sitting apart, they would be joined in their high sorrow, made one in a passion of abnegation.

But he could not leave the house. Each knew that when he did leave it must be forever. They were agreed upon the impossibility of a continued proximity, upon the mockery of a sentimental friendship, and they clung, with weak tenacity to every slipping moment of this concluding interview.

In one of their long pauses a clock struck twelve.

Muriel started.

"Twelve o'clock," said von Klausen. It was as if he spoke of a tolling bell.

"Twelve o'clock," repeated Muriel stupidly.

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They rose simultaneously and faced each other; two children caught in that mesh of convention which men have devised to thwart the heart of man.

Then a timid recollection that had long been rankling in Muriel's mind rushed to her lips. She recalled her glimpse of von Klausen with the Spanish dancer at L'Abbaye, and she told him of it.

"How could you?" she asked. "How could you?"

With a waxing tide of earnestness, he told her of his emotional life. He told her of his escapades, of how lightly he had esteemed them when they occurred and how heavily they bore upon him now. He repented as passionately as he had sinned, and he vowed himself thenceforth to chastity.

To Muriel, however, as he told it, all that he had done in the past seemed of moment only in a manner other than that in which he regarded it. She saw it, in one quick flash, as the natural deviations of a force balked by unnatural laws. She saw that this man had learned where Jim had remained ignorant. It even seemed to her well that dissipation had once held him, since at this last, by freeing himself, he was proving how much stronger was her hold on him.

"It doesn't matter," she said; "it doesn't matter." And she put out her hand.

They had come at last, they felt, to the parting of their ways. A moment more and they would go on, forever, apart.

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He looked at her cheek, turned pale; at her wide eyes, stricken with pain. As she had appeared to Stainton on that night at the Metropolitan Opera House, so now she appeared to Stainton's successor, but richer, fuller, mature: she was slim and soft, this woman he was losing; her wonderful hair was as black as a thunder-cloud in May; she had high, curved brows and eyes that were large and dark and tender; her lips were damp, and she was warm and dusky and clothed in the light of the stars. He took her hand and, at the touch, he gave a gasping cry and encircled her in his arms.

It was then that Stainton entered the room.

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## XIX

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### HUSBAND AND WIFE

They sprang apart. They could not be certain that he had seen them. Each was sure that their arms had loosed the moment when the handle of the door had rattled. Each communicated this certainty to the other in one glance. Each turned toward the husband.

Stainton smiled heartily.

"Didn't expect me so soon?" he asked. He went to his wife and kissed her. "Hello, Captain," he said, shaking the Austrian's cold hand. "I see you have been good enough to come and cheer up Muriel as I asked you. But, by Jove, you are rather a late stayer, aren't you? A custom of your country, perhaps? Oh, no offence. I'm glad you are here."

"When——" began Muriel.

"I got as far as Montélimart when they caught me with one of their blue telegrams, calmly postponing the meeting until next week. They will have to pay for that postponement, Captain. Lucky thing I wired them what train I was coming by, or I should have gone the last ninety-odd miles and landed at Lyons before I heard that—I wasn't wanted."

Von Klausen had keyed himself for heroics; Muriel had been on the verge of fainting; but Stainton's tone reassured them both. The Austrian, nevertheless, made for the door: to face disaster was one thing; to court it quite another.

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"I have indeed remained late," he said. "I hope that I have not bored your good wife."

"Oh," answered Stainton, patting Muriel's pale cheek, "I am sure that my good wife has been

entertained. Haven't you, dear?"

Muriel opened her lips. She stammered, but she managed at last distinctly to say:

"Captain von Klausen has been very kind."

"I thank you," said von Klausen, with his Continental bow.

"What's your hurry?" persisted Jim.

"You have said, sir, that it is late."

"Not so late that you can't stop a few minutes more."

The Captain thought otherwise. He really must go.

Stainton saw him to the front door, and then returned to the drawing-room, where his wife stood just on the spot where he had left her.

"Now," said the husband, quietly. "I think that it is time we had an explanation."

She swayed a little, and he came forward to catch her; but at his approach she flew into a storm of hot anger.

"Don't touch me!" she cried.

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She had found herself at last. What she had been she looked at squarely, what she was she would be entire. Stainton, in his habitual rôle of fond protector, was a figure that she could feel gently towards, could even pity; but Stainton as an accusing husband she now realised that she could not but hate. She looked at him with a scorn that was not lessened by the fact that, goading it from a deep recess in her heart, there cringed an imp of fear. She knew that she hated him.

Jim stopped short.

"Don't touch me!" she repeated. "You believe I've deceived you. Well, you never meant to go to Lyons. You have tricked me. You have lied to me!"

Tradition always shows us the wronged husband in a towering rage, in the throes of consuming indignation. Truth, however, with no respect for either man or his traditions, occasionally assigns to the deceiving wife the part of condemner. Constant though truth is, men are the slaves of their traditions, and when they meet truth, and tradition is contradicted, they are confused. In spite of the evidences of his senses, it did not for that moment so much as occur to Stainton to pursue the part of judge. Instead, he pulled a chair a little nearer to her.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked.

Muriel sat down.

"Well," she demanded, "what have you to say for yourself?"

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"About my trip to Lyons?"

"About this spying on me, about this surprising me in my own house."

"I have some right, I think, to come home."

"You meant to trap me. You would never have dared to talk about an 'explanation' while the Captain was here to defend me!"

"I did not mean to trap you. I meant only to confirm a theory that has been in my mind for some time."

"So you have been suspecting me for some time and hiding your suspicions! Why couldn't you be brave enough to come out with them at the first?"

"Why couldn't you be brave enough to tell me of your love affair?"

"Love affair? There has been no love affair."

Stainton rose and nervously walked to the window. For a few moments he stood with his back to her, his eyes on the moonlit sea.

"Have you noticed," he at last asked, without turning, "that I haven't for some time mentioned your former distaste for the Captain's society?"

Muriel was silent.

"It seemed strange to me at the very beginning," Jim went on; "but I tried hard to misinterpret it. I tried to shut my eyes to it. Then, that night at L'Abbaye, I saw how you felt at the sight of him with the Spanish dancer——"

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Muriel had an instant of weakness. During that instant, the low flames of the lamp, the empty sconces, the whole white-panelled room revolved, with an upward motion, slowly around her.

"You saw that!"

"I saw that something inside the restaurant had upset you, and, naturally, as you started down

the stairs, I turned about to observe what it was."

The wife fought for her self-control and won it.

"Deceit! Deceit even then!"

"Since you didn't seem to want the matter mentioned, I, of course, did not mention it; but I understood why you wanted to leave Paris—and I understood later why you wanted to go back."

He paused. She scorned to give him a reply.

"To be sure," he presently continued, "I tried, when I learned of your illness, to believe that your illness was really the cause; but I did not wholly believe what I tried to believe. After our trip to Italy, too, there came the night of the fête. I could tell when von Klausen and you came back from the Bois that morning that there was something in the air, and I resolved to give you a fair chance. I was not lost on the boulevards: I separated myself from you."

He was looking at her now. She sprang to her feet. Her features, once beautiful, twisted themselves between amazement and anger.

"A fair chance!" she screamed. "You wanted to give me a fair chance? You threw me into his arms—or tried to—and you call that a fair chance?"

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Stainton, worn and travel-stained, his face dark with coal-dust, which clogged the furrows and accentuated them, appeared grey and old. Yet he smiled quietly.

"Certainly," he said. "While I was in the party, there was no danger; your love for me—or failing your love, your moral strength—need not assert itself against von Klausen so long as I was by. I absented myself to give your love and your moral strength a fair chance."

"You coward!"

"Not at all. To have feared that you would fail me would have been to be a coward. The only way to end the fear was to give it its full opportunity. Otherwise the fear—a very small one then—would have continued indefinitely: after von Klausen had dropped out of our lives, his influence untried, I should have feared you with other men."

"You dare to say that!"

He was returning to the attitude of mind in which he had entered the room. The novelty of her attack was, from its frequent thrusts, losing its point.

"Why not?" he asked. "The surest thing about a fault of this kind is that it depends wholly upon the person destined to commit it, not at all upon any particular accomplice." He was quite calm again. "If," he went on, "a woman compromises herself with X, at least after she has become a wife, it is only a question of time before she will compromise herself with Y and Z. If she wants to compromise herself with X and only exterior circumstances interfere to prevent her, she is certain, sooner or later, to commit the fault with Y or Z, either or both, when the Y and Z happen to appear, as appear they infallibly must. Their personality doesn't matter. Any Y, any Z, will serve. In fact, though this fact does not concern me personally, I believe that, even if she should free herself from her husband and marry an X with whom she has managed to compromise herself, it is only a matter of a few months or a few years before Y and Z will have their innings anyhow."

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Muriel's fists were clenched at her sides. Her eyes shone and her cheeks were crimson. Tight as her stays were, her white breast above the low-cut black corsage rose and fell like white-capped waves seen in a lightning-flash on a darkened sea.

"I shan't stay in this room and listen any longer to such things," she declared.

He raised a steady hand.

"Only a moment more, please," he said.

Her reply was merely to stand there before him. He continued:

"So, as I say, I gave you that fair chance. You weren't equal to it. I took you away from Paris again—the next day, wasn't it?—because you wanted to go, but I knew that your wanting to go away from von Klausen was a purely temporary mood of repentance. I had been patient, for I am by nature a patient man; but I grew tired of waiting. When this Austrian turned up here in Marseilles, as I was sure he would soon turn up, I decided to make an end of it. Now"—he spoke as if he were concluding an affair of business—"I have made that end."

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"How have you made that end?"

Stainton smiled wanly.

"My dear——" he said.

"Don't call me that."

"Then, Muriel. Muriel, don't try to bluff it out. You can't do it: you are not naturally a liar, and the successful liar is born, not made."



"How have you made an end?"

"By coming back from Avignon; by never going farther away than Avignon."

"You mean that you think—that you dare to think that I—that the Captain and—that we——"

"I don't think," said Stainton in a tone still restrained; "I know. Given what your temperament has shown itself to be; given, too, the preliminary circumstances; remembering that von Klausen came to this house——"

"At your invitation!"

"Oh, yes, he came at my invitation. But remembering that he remained alone with you in this room until after midnight—I say, given all these facts, and then adding the determining piece of evidence that I wanted—the evidence of seeing you in his arms—no man in his senses would for one moment doubt——"

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"Don't say it! Don't you dare to say it!" She sprang back from him, her disordered hair tossed blackly about her face, her deep eyes blazing.

"Muriel," he cried, "are you still going to say——"

"I am going to say that I hate you! I say that after to-night I will never look at you again! I say I loathe you! I hate you! You liar! You unclean-minded old man!"

He shook under her words as if they had been strange, unexpected blows.

At the sight of him, at the sound of that final phrase in her own high-pitched voice, at the release of the thought of him that had been so long festering in her mind—at first unguessed, then vehemently denied, but always there and always becoming more and more poisonous—the imp of fear leaped from her heart. Jim had once planned to perform a process that he mentally called "making a woman of her": in a way that he had never suspected, his plan had met success. Muriel had achieved maturity.

"Now you listen to me," she commanded.

Her head was thrown back. Her figure was erect. She pointed to a chair.

Stainton moved to the chair, but did not seat himself. He gripped its back and leaned across the back toward her.

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So they stood, facing each other.

"This has been a 'good match' for me," she said. "It was a 'sensible alliance.' I 'did well for myself.' And to think that hundreds and hundreds of young girls are being carefully educated and brought up and trained in schools or in their own homes to be fitted for and to hope—actually to hope!—for this. 'A good match!' I was poor and young, and I married a rich man older than myself; but I was never for one minute your wife."

Stainton made a sally to recapture the situation.

"You were a good imitation," he said.

"Never," said she. "Not even that. What you wanted wasn't a wife, anyhow. You loved your crooked theories so well that you were blind and couldn't see that life was straight. You couldn't change what was real, so you tried to bend what was ideal to make it meet the real, and what was ideal snapped, and you didn't even know it snapped. Oh, I know what you wanted. Not a wife. You wanted someone that was all at once an admirer and a servant and a mistress. You didn't know it, but that was it: somebody who'd be the three things for the wages of the third. And me: I was something that my aunt's husband didn't want about the house, and so I was shuffled off on you. Is that being your wife?"

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"For a time you were a good imitation."

"I tried to be what you wanted me to be, if that is what you mean. I tried. I took your word for what a wife was and what love was. But I soon found out, and then all the time I was saying to myself that things would change, that they were so bad they must change—and they wouldn't."

"So you bluffed?" he asked with the hint of a sneer on his long upper lip.

"I wanted to be honest." Her voice softened for the phrase. "Oh, don't you remember, at the very start, how I *said* I wanted to be honest? But somehow all life, all the world, every littlest thing that happened, seemed to join against being honest. If God wants you to be honest, why does He make it so hard? The truth was that our being married was a lie, and so all we did was lies and lies."

"You told me that I gave you all you wanted, Muriel."

"All that you could give, but not the one thing you had promised to give—not what I gave you—not youth." Her tone hardened again. "What was the rest to that? If I told you that you gave me all I wanted, you always *knew* that *you* had all *you* wanted. Well, you had. But did you ever think that a girl begins life with plans and dreams as much as a man does? You sinned against me and against Nature. Oh, yes, and I sinned too. I sinned ignorantly, but I sinned against Nature. I let

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myself be married to a man three times my age—and this is Nature's punishment. You taught me, you elaborately taught me, to be hungry, and then you were scared and angry because you couldn't satisfy my hunger, and because I *was* hungry. We had only one thing in common, and that was the thing that couldn't last. Well, then, I'll tell you now"—she flashed it out at him—"what happened to me while you were selling the mine was not an accident!"

This, even in his most suspicious moments, he had not foreseen. Anger and horror struggled for him.

"Muriel," he cried, "you don't mean——"

"Yes, I do, I do! For some reason, I don't know why, I had got that girl's address, that girl in the box at the Bal Tabarin that night, and I went to her, and she sent me to someone. I knew once and for all that I didn't love you. I knew you were too old for it to be right for you to have a child. I knew it was wrong for me to have a child when I didn't want one and didn't know anything about taking care of one. Don't think I didn't suffer. It wasn't all physical, either. Do you remember the time you took me to buy baby-clothes? I thought I would go *crazy—crazy!* But I knew I had the right to refuse to be a mother against my will!"

He did not try to show her what all his training cried out against her deed. He could not try to indicate the injury that she had most likely done her health. He was too nearly stunned. He only asked:

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"You loved him—then?"

"I didn't love you."

"Did you love him?"

"No. I thought I hated him. Later, when I knew I loved him, I even lied to him and told him I didn't love him. I can't forgive myself that. But then, when I did *that* thing, I only knew what I've told you."

Stainton turned away. She saw him make an effort to straighten himself, but his shoulders bent and his head drooped. He was shuffling toward the door.

Nevertheless, Muriel was now ruthlessly honest.

"But I love him now," she said.

"Yes," said Stainton. His voice was dull.

"When you married me," said Muriel, "I knew nothing—nothing. I was no more fit to be your wife than you, because you knew so much and so little, were fit to be my husband."

Stainton half turned.

"And he?" Jim asked.

"He loves me: you only liked having me."

He turned slowly away again.

She thought that she heard him whisper:

"No child!"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I have lost everything else; but I have lost everything but a child. I only wish I could lose that, but I have a baby, a little dead baby. It will never leave me: it's the little ghost-baby of the woman I never had a chance to be."

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He said nothing. He went down to the dining-room, merely for want of going somewhere away from her. He sat there in the darkness until, an hour later, he heard her shut and bolt the bedroom door. He took a candle in his shaking hand and studied in a mirror his gaunt grey face. One of the twin fears that had dominated his earlier life was still with him. She was right; he was growing old.

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## XX

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### HUSBAND AND LOVER

At eight o'clock in the morning, when the warm sun beat upon the sea and flooded the rooms of the villa, Stainton, still clad in his travelling clothes, returned to the drawing-room and rang the bell for the maid.

"Go to Mrs. Stainton's room," he said to the maid, who spoke more or less English, "and tell her that, as soon as she is ready to see me, I——"

"But, monsieur——"

"You may add that I won't keep her fifteen minutes."

"But, monsieur, it is since an hour madame is gone out."

"Gone out?" Why had she gone so early and so silently? Had she not tried to conceal her exit, he would have heard her. The natural suspicion flashed through Stainton's mind. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Madame say you are not to be disturbed."

"Hum. I see. Did she leave any message?"

"But, yes; she leave this note here. She say the note to be given to monsieur only when monsieur demanded her whereabouts."

Stainton took the envelope that the girl handed to him and, as the maid left the room, opened it. He was reading it through for the twentieth time when the domestic reappeared. [Pg 319]

"A gentleman to see monsieur," she said.

"What gentleman?" asked Stainton, though he guessed the answer to his question.

The maid presented a card.

"Show Captain von Klausen up here," said Jim.

A moment later, husband and lover stood alone together.

"Good-morning," said Stainton.

He held out his hand, and von Klausen, after a swift hesitation, took it.

The Austrian's expression was disturbed. He was unshaven. It was obvious that he, too, had passed a sleepless night. The sight seemed, somehow, to restore his host's self-confidence.

"You will please to pardon for this early intrusion——" von Klausen began.

Stainton smiled.

"You are always so pleasant, Captain," he said, "that you never intrude. Besides, the earlier the better. As it happens, I was just this moment thinking of you."

Von Klausen bowed. There was a brief pause, the Austrian's blue eyes wandering about the room in an endeavour to escape Stainton's glance, and Stainton's eyes fastened thoughtfully upon the Austrian. [Pg 320]

"Well?" asked the husband.

Von Klausen coughed.

"Madame is—is——" he started, but stopped short.

"You asked for me. Did you expect to find her up at this time of day?"

"Oh, no—no: certainly not. Pardon me. I forgot the hour."

"Ah, you often forget the hour, don't you, Captain?"

The Austrian braced himself. He raised his chin defiantly. He met the issue directly.

"You refer," he asked, "to my late call of last evening—yes?"

"More or less. I am rather curious about that call."

"Sir, there is nothing about it to excite your curiosity. You asked me to call. There is nothing of my call that you may not learn from your wife."

"No doubt. Of course not; but it may be that I prefer to ask you."

Von Klausen was in a corner. Anger he could have met with anger, but here was something that he did not comprehend.

"I can answer no question," he said, stiffly, "that you have not asked of Mrs. Stainton."

"How do you know that I haven't asked her?"

"I do not know that you have."

"You are sure of that?" [Pg 321]

"What do you wish to say, Mr. Stainton?"

"I mean: are you sure that you haven't seen her since you left here last night?"

The Austrian's face expressed a bewilderment that Stainton could not mistrust.

"How is that possible?" inquired von Klausen.

"Oh, of course!" Stainton, convinced, shrugged his shoulders. "However, I do want to make a few

inquiries of you."

"Then I prefer to wait until your wife descends, so that you may make them in her presence."

Stainton still held in his left hand the letter that Muriel had addressed to him. He tapped it upon the knuckles of his right hand.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I can't conveniently wait so long. Captain von Klausen, are you in love with my wife?"

The Austrian rose precipitately. His blond moustache bristled.

"Sir!" said he.

"I merely wanted to know."

"At your question I am amazed, sir."

"Oh, I really had a good reason for asking."

"In my country no reason suffices for such a question."

"Hum. Well, you see, neither my wife nor I belong to your country, and you are not in your country now. However, there is no need for you to get excited, Captain. I am sorry if I seem to have intruded on your confidence with a lady; but, to tell you the truth, as my wife has admitted that she is in love with you, I was not unnaturally somewhat curious to discover whether you reciprocated her affection."

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Von Klausen's eyes protruded. This husband was, obviously, mad. He might have been driven mad by his discovery. The discovery seemed a thing accomplished. With a great in-taking of breath, the Austrian made answer:

"You have loved your wife. Why should *I* be ashamed to say that I love her?"

If von Klausen expected an explosion, he was disappointed.

"Well," said Stainton, calmly, "that is one way of looking at it."

"Please?"

"Never mind. You say you love her?"

"Yes."

Stainton looked at him narrowly, from under heavy brows. He regularly tapped his knuckles with the envelope.

"For a day?" he asked.

"Sir?"

"I mean: is this a world-without-end business so far as you are concerned, or is it one of your little amusements by the way?"

The Austrian clenched his teeth.

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"Do you mean to insult me, sir?"

"I assure you that I mean nothing of the sort."

"Then you insult your wife!"

"Not at all. I am sorry that you should suppose I could think ill of her."

"If you do not think ill of her, you have no right to ask such a question as this which you have asked."

"It's not impossible that I should be a trifle interested, you know."

"I cannot understand, sir, how you can have the calmness——"

"Why not? She is my wife, you see. What I want to know is whether you are genuinely, sincerely in love with her. You know what I mean. As between man and man now: is this a for-ever-and-ever affair with you?"

The Austrian's bewilderment found vent in a long sigh.

"It is," said he.

"Good," said Stainton. He thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets and bent forward. "If I let her get a divorce from me, will you marry her?" he asked.

"Do you make a joke?"

"I don't consider this a joking matter, Captain. I ask you a frank question and I want a frank answer."

Von Klausen doubted his ears, but he replied:

"I would desire nothing better, but my faith forbids."

"You're sincere in that?"

"Absolutely."

"I mean about your faith, you know."

"Whatever else may be charged against me, sir, heresy or infidelity may not be charged."

"Have a cigar," said Stainton.

He produced his cigar-case, gave the Austrian a cigar, held a steady match while his guest secured a light, and then, with a cigar between his teeth, began to walk rapidly up and down the room, puffing quietly, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Look here," he said. "I am the kind of man that lives to look ahead and prepare for all contingencies. I do not always succeed, but I see no harm in trying. Well. When I first began to think about this thing, I said I would be prepared for the worst, if the worst came. I remembered your prejudices, and I had a fellow do some research work for me at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and yesterday I spent some time in the seminary library at Avignon. My dear fellow, you haven't got a leg to stand on."

"No leg?"

"Not in your objections to divorce and remarriage."

"The Church——"

"Was founded by, or at any rate pretends allegiance to, Jesus of Nazareth. Now, Jesus of Nazareth is reported to have said—it's not certain—something that may seem to bear out your theories; but that something which may be twisted to your way was said just about two thousand years ago to a small, outlying, semi-barbarous province. Are you going to try to apply it to civilisation to-day?"

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The Austrian had philosophically seated himself in the chair against which Jim had leaned the night before.

"I apply the Sermon on the Mount," said von Klausen.

"Do you? I didn't think you did. But we'll pass that. Your faith bases its argument on the interpretation of that text made by the Early Church, and the Christian Fathers interpreted it in just about two dozen different ways."

"So?" said von Klausen: he would humour this lunatic.

"In the first place, at the beginning of the Christian Era marriage in Rome was a private partnership that the parties could dissolve by mutual consent, or by one notifying the other, as in any other partnership; that was part of Roman law, and for centuries neither the Church nor its Fathers disputed that law. In all the history of the first phase of Christianity in Rome you can't find one time when the whole Church accepted the idea that marriage was indissoluble. Once or twice the Church tried to get the law to require the Church's sanction before decree of divorce would be legally valid, but that was not a denial of divorce; it was a recognition and an endeavour to capture the control and exploitation of divorces."

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"That matters nothing," said von Klausen. "These things were determined otherwise. With all my heart I wish not, but they were."

"How? The Church began by having nothing to do with marriages. Weddings were not held in the churches and so of course marriage was not considered a sacrament. I can give you chapter and verse for everything I say. About the only early council that tried to interfere with the law was the Council of 416, or some time near that. It tried to make Rome abolish divorce, but no emperor listened to it till early in the ninth century—Charlemagne, and he practised divorce himself. Only a little earlier—I think it was in 870—the Church officially allowed dissolution of marriage. In the Middle Ages the episcopal courts allowed divorce and were supported by the popes."

"Did you not find that the Council of Trent declared marriage indissoluble?"

"I expected to, but I didn't. All it said was that if anyone said the Church erred in regarding marriage as indissoluble, *anathema sit*. The Council of Trent seems to have been trying to patch up a peace with the Eastern Church, which never did regard marriage as indissoluble." He shook his head at von Klausen, smiling gravely, "You see, it won't do," he said.

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"You have not quoted the Fathers," the Austrian almost mockingly said.

"I can. I took care of that. I can go back to St. Paul: he allowed divorce when a husband and wife had religious differences. Chrysostom tolerated divorce. So did Justin Martyr and Tertullian. Origen was so afraid of women that he—he mutilated himself, but he allowed divorce for certain causes, and when he condemned it in certain phases, he was careful to say that he was 'debating' rather than affirming."

"St. Augustine is the authority in this matter."

"And no one other person ever said so many contradictory things about it. Why, he thought his marriage was almost as wrong as his affairs without marriage. He considered the social evil a necessity and wouldn't condemn downright polygamy. In one place he admits divorce for adultery; in another he merely 'doubts' if there is any other good cause, and in the third he won't have it at all. When he finally gets down to bed-rock, he says that the text on which the anti-divorce people take their stand is so hazy that anybody is justified in making a mistake."

Stainton paused to relight his cigar.

"But you are talking of divorce," said von Klausen, "not of remarriage."

"Remarriage follows logically," Jim responded. "The one flows from the other."

Von Klausen shrugged.

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"Yes," persisted Jim. "Jerome declared against a second marriage after the death of the first husband or wife, but your faith doesn't follow him, does it? The Fathers differed in this just as they did in everything else connected with the subject. The early bishops publicly blessed the remarriage of at least one woman that had divorced her husband on the ground of adultery. Epiphanius said that if a divorced person remarried the Church would absolve him from blame. It was weakness, he said, and I suppose it is, but the Church would tolerate the weakness and wouldn't reject him from its rites or its salvation. Origen didn't approve of remarriage, but he said that it was no more than mere technical adultery, and the furthest that St. Augustine himself could go was to have 'grave doubts' about it."

The Austrian, despite his nervousness, had shown an intellectual interest in Stainton's exposition, but the interest was only intellectual.

"It makes no matter what they said the Church should do," he insisted; "it is what the Church has done. The Church has made marriage a sacrament."

"Doesn't the Church rule that a marriage can be consummated only by an act of the flesh?"

"Yes."

"Then how can what is done by the flesh be a sacrament?"

"I do not know. I know that it is. The Church, whether early or late, has spoken and it has said that marriage is a sacrament indissoluble save by the death of the husband or the wife."

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Stainton put down his cigar.

"Captain," he said, "you are in earnest, aren't you?"

The Austrian flushed, but did not flinch.

"I am," said he.

"You love her?"

"I do."

"Truly?"

"With heart and soul, both."

"And there is no changing your faith?"

"No way."

"There isn't any short-cut, any quick trail over the mountain, any bridle-path? A fellow cannot get an Indulgence—nothing of that sort?"

"I wish—I wish deeply that one might; but—no."

"No," said Jim with a little sigh, "I suppose not nowadays. I looked that up, too. Public opinion is pretty strong, and as wrong as usual." He seemed to shake the subject from him. "And," he ended, "now that I have bored you with my cheap pedantry, I remember that I have been a bad host: I have not asked you your errand."

What change was coming over the madman now?

"My errand?" asked von Klausen.

"Exactly. You come here at about 9 A.M., and I take up your valuable time with a discussion of ecclesiastical polity. What was it that you wanted to see me about?"

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What the Austrian had wanted he had long since learned. He had no sooner left the villa on the night previous than he began to doubt whether his supposition that Stainton was unsuspecting was quite so well founded as he had at first imagined. He recalled a certain constraint in the husband's deportment, and then he imagined other tokens that had not been displayed. In the end, he decided to return to Muriel's home at the earliest possible moment, discover whether there were any real danger and, if there was, face its consequences. Now, however he learned that Muriel had made some sort of confession to Stainton and that Stainton had received that confession in a manner inexplicable to von Klausen. Confronted with Jim's abrupt question, he

did not know what to say, and so he found himself saying:

"I should like to see Mrs. Stainton."

Stainton whistled.

"I wish you could," he answered. "Indeed, indeed, I wish you could, my boy; but I am sorry to say that it is out of the question."

"You forbid it?" Von Klausen wished that these confounded Americans could be brought to see the simplicity of settling complex difficulties by the code of honour.

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"I didn't say that I forbade it; I said it was out of the question. I meant that it was out of the question."

The Austrian bent forward, hot anger in his eyes.

"Do you dare to deprive her of her liberty?" he asked.

"On the contrary, my dear sir, she has taken her liberty. She has gone away."

The thing seemed incredible to von Klausen:

"Away from Marseilles?"

Stainton nodded.

"That's it," he agreed.

There shot through von Klausen's mind the thought that this lunatic had killed her. If so, he would surely kill the lunatic or be killed in the attempt.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I believe that you are——"

"Captain von Klausen, I have learned all that I want to know about your religious faith, and I am not in the slightest degree interested in the question of your other beliefs. I say to you that my wife has gone away, and I am afraid that, whether you like it or not, you are obliged, for the present, to accept my word."

"I will not accept your word!"

"Pardon me, but I don't see what else you can very well do. Of course, you might watch the house, but the Corniche gets very hot by midday."

"You joke. You can joke about such a thing!"

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"I have never been so serious as I am now."

Stainton emphasised his words with a gesture of his left hand, in which he held the now crumpled letter.

"That letter!" said von Klausen with sudden inspiration. "It is from her!"

"It is."

"Ah, you have intercepted a letter from her to me!"

"I am not in the habit of reading my wife's personal letters to other people—when she writes any. This note is addressed to me, and it is this note that tells me of her departure."

"It tells you where she is going?"

"It tells me that and more. It tells me that she is sorry for a wound she thinks she has inflicted on my feelings, and she proposed to look for rest in a certain secluded place."

The Austrian's blue eyes brightened.

"A secluded place?" he repeated, excitedly.

"Exactly; but I shall not tell you its name. I shall keep that to myself until I have had another interview with my wife."

The Captain looked closely at Stainton.

"You mean to follow and chastise her?" he asked.

"There," said Stainton, quietly, "I think we reach a point where the matter becomes entirely my own affair."

If you look in your Baedeker's "Southern France," you will find, in very small type, on page 479, the following brief paragraph:

"From Aubagne or Auriol to the Ste. Baume. From Aubagne an omnibus (5 fr.) plies four times weekly via (3 M.) Gémenos to the (4 hrs.) Hôtellerie (see below). From Auriol an omnibus (50 c.) plies to the (5½ M.) St. Zacherie (Lion d'Or), whence we have still 8 M. of bad road (carr. 10-20 fr.) to the Hôtellerie de la Ste. Baume, situated on the plateau or Plan d'Aulps, ¾ hr. below the grotto. The E. portion of the plateau is occupied by a virgin \*Forest with fine trees—The Ste. Baume is, according to tradition, the grotto to which Mary Magdalen retired to end her days; it has been transformed into a chapel and is still a frequented pilgrim resort. It has given its name to the mountains among which it lies."

So much for Baedeker. But Baedeker either does not know everything, or else, like a really good traveller, he keeps to himself, lest tourists spoil, some of the best things that he has seen. The plateau above which hangs the cave that tradition describes as The Magdalen's last residence is, in fact, as far out of the world as if its first tenant had tried to climb as near to Heaven as she could before she quitted the earth altogether, and so far as the wandering American is concerned, it might quite as well be across the celestial border.

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Yet it was to the Ste. Baume that Muriel had gone, and that she had written to her husband. For Muriel, too, had passed a night of wracking reflection, and the dim dawn had found her clear upon one resolve.

The anger that had been kindled by Stainton's accusation slowly died away. She saw that, though he had assumed her love for von Klausen to have carried her so much farther than she had indeed been carried, the difference was only of degree; and, though she was far from condemning herself, she knew that her husband would, even knowing all, condemn her because he would judge her by the standards of that ancient fallacy which sees wrong not in the deed but in the desire.

She was clear in her own mind as to the course that she had pursued, but she was equally clear that Jim had acted as truly in conformance with his lights as she had with hers. She recognised as she had never before recognised those qualities in Jim which, she felt, should have at least won from her a less recriminative tone than she had, the night before, assumed toward him. She remembered the evening when she had promised herself to him in that long ago and far away New York—how tall and strong and fine he had seemed, how virile and yet how much the master, of his fate and of himself as well. She remembered how he had crushed her to his breast—how she had responded. She was changed. She was sure that she was changed for the better. But what was it that had changed her? That night in New York the miracle had happened. Were miracles of such short life?

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In an agony of endeavour she set herself to recalling his thousand little kindnesses, and each one seemed to rise at her summons to point its accusing finger at her anger. Why couldn't she have been gentler to him? She was at a loss for the answer. She told herself that, in character, he was unscalable heights above her. She was ashamed of her anger, ashamed of her hatred; she regarded him, in her self-abasement, as something even of a saint, yet love him she could not: the thought of any physical contact with him made her shiver.

Franz von Klausen she knew that she did love and would always love. She was married to Jim, and Franz himself said that marriage was a sacrament. Where, then, was the occult power of the sacrament that it could not hold her heart? She could not, in honesty, live with Jim as his wife; according to von Klausen's standard, she could not in moral rectitude live with von Klausen. What was left for her but to run away?

Thus it was that she arrived at her decision. In her primal impulses she was still only a young animal that had been caught in the marriage trap, that had torn herself free, and that now, wounded and bleeding, wanted to hide and suffer alone.

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She had some money in her purse—a thousand francs. She wrote the note to Jim, who she felt certain would supply her with any more money that she might require, gave it to the maid, left the house on her tiptoes and, after a few hesitant enquiries of a lonely policeman, took the tram to Aubagne. In Aubagne she hired a carriage for the Ste. Baume.

It was a marvellous drive under a sky of brilliant blue. Leaving behind a fruitful valley dotted with prettily gardened, badly designed villas, they climbed for four hours, into a tremendous sweep of rugged mountains. Upward, until the vegetation lost its luxuriance and became sparse, the carriage curved around and around peak set upon peak, only thirty miles from the sea, yet nine hundred metres above it. Sometimes, looking over the side, she could count five loops of the road beneath her and as many more above, glistening yellow and deserted among the gaunt outlines of rock. Not a house, not another wayfarer was in view, only the billowing mountains that rose out of wild timberlands below to gigantic cliffs bare of any growth, perpendicular combs, sheer precipices miles long and nearly a thousand feet in height, which seemed to bend and sway along the sky-edge. With a sudden curve that showed even Marseilles and the ocean shimmering against the horizon, they rounded the last height, descended but a few hundred feet upon a wide plateau, the sides of which were partially wooded chasms, and came, among a dozen scattered houses, to the Hôtellerie that had for many years been a Dominican monastery and still maintained the simplicity of its builders.

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They ushered her through the tiled halls, past the chapel, and, amid sacred images set in the



whitewashed walls, to her room, the bare cell of a priest, with the name of one of the early Fathers of the Church inscribed above the door and a crucifix over the narrow iron bed.

A flood of memories from her convent days deluged her. Muriel sank upon her knees and prayed.

She had not breakfasted, and she could eat no lunch. A half-hour after her arrival she began her ascent to the Grotto of the Magdalen.

She walked across the plain, first through the fields and then through a gradually mounting forest to which an axe had never been laid. The hill became steeper and steeper; it grew into a mountain. The leaf-strewn path turned, under ancient trees with interlacing branches, about giant boulders covered with moss through the centuries that had gone by since they were first flung there from the towering frost-loosened crags above. She passed an old spring and a ruined shrine, and so she reached at last the foot of a precipice as bare as her hand, a huge wall of smooth rock that leaned far forward from the clouds as if it were about to fall.

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Under a crumbling gateway she passed and ascended the worn, canting steps, which, by a series of sharply angular divergences, led a third of the way up the face of the precipice. There, fronting a narrow, deserted natural balcony, was the grotto.

Doors had been placed at the mouth of the great cave, but the doors were open. Through them, far in the cool shadows, Muriel caught a glimpse of the white altar and a sound of dripping water that fell from the cavern's ceiling of living rock into the Holy Pool. She took an irresolute step toward this strange chapel; then she turned toward the low parapet and looked over the mountain side, over the primæval forest, to the plateau far below and the peaks and ridges beyond. She remembered von Klausen's words:

"The silent chapel; the long, fertile plain that seems a world away; the snow-capped peaks to the northward; the faint tinkle of distant sheep-bells, and the memory——"

She gave a little gasp: her husband was coming up the steps.

He mounted slowly. His back bent painfully to the climb. She could see that he was breathing heavily and, as he raised his face to hers, she noticed with a throb of self-accusation that it looked tired and old.

"You followed?"

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He nodded briefly.

"Why did you follow me?" she asked.

It was fully a minute before he regained his breath; but when he spoke he spoke calmly and gently.

"I came," he said, "to say some things that I should have said last night."

Muriel braced herself against the parapet.

"Very well," said she.

He understood her.

"I don't mean to scold you, dear," began Stainton.

His eyes regarded her wistfully, and she turned away, glancing first over the precipice where, below them, the treetops tossed and then up, far up, straight up, to the awful height of sheer cliff overhead where, somewhere just beyond her sight, there nestled, she knew, the little chapel of St. Pilon.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Wait and you will understand."

She felt now that forgiveness was the one thing that she could not bear. She was learning the most difficult of the moral lessons: that, hard as punishment may be, there is nothing so terrible as pardon.

"I want you to be angry," she said. "You ought to be angry. I was angry with you. That is what I am sorry for. It is all that I am sorry for, but I am very, very sorry for it. I ought to love you—I promised to love you; I thought I did love you, and if ever a man deserved to be loved, you deserve it. And yet I don't love you. I can't! Oh, I'll come back with you. I can't live with you as your wife, but I'll live with you. If you want me to, we can start right away."

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But Stainton would not yet hear of that.

"Wait," he said, "wait. Perhaps we can think of something. Perhaps something will turn up." Jim put out a hand, a hand grown thin and heavily veined since his marriage, and timidly patted her arm. "My poor little girl!" he whispered. "My poor little child!"

"No, no!" she said, drawing away. "You must hate me!"

"I could never do that, Muriel."

"But you have to! Think of it: I don't love you—you, my husband—and I do—I do——"

The words that had come so easily by night and in anger she dared not utter here in calmness and by day. But Stainton supplied:

"You do love him?"

She bowed her dark head in assent.

"You are very sure?" he asked.

"Very, very sure."

"So that it was not"—he hesitated as if he knew that he had no right to put the question—"it was not merely passion?"

Muriel looked straight into his eyes.

"It was so far from merely passion," she answered, "that I have only twice even so much as kissed him."

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Stainton believed her now. His hand dropped from her arm. It seemed to him that she would have hurt him less had her love for von Klausen been baser.

There was a long pause.

"I see," said Stainton at last; and again: "I see."

He looked up at the high cliff bending far above them.

"And—von Klausen," he presently pursued—"you will let me ask it, won't you? In a moment you will see that I have a good reason. You are sure that his love for you is—is of the same sort that yours is for him?"

"Quite."

"Why?"

"On the same evidence."

"I see. I had begun to think so this morning. He came to see me."

She gave a short cry.

"Is he hurt?" she asked.

"Why should I hurt him? It is not his fault that he has hurt me. No, I didn't hurt him; I merely came by train to Aubagne, and thence here by motor-bus, to learn—what I have learned; and to say—what I am about to say."

"You told him where I was?"

"I did not name the place. I simply said that you had gone away, leaving a note in which you told me that you were bound for a certain secluded spot to be alone."

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Muriel clasped her white hands in distress.

"He will guess," she said. "He will guess from that. It was he told me of this place—told me only the other day in much those words."

Stainton smiled a little.

"I fancied he would guess," said he: "I intended that he should."

"But he will follow!"

"No doubt."

"You—you—why do you speak so?"

"He can't get a convenient train from Marseilles, so he will probably come the whole way by motor."

"He will—he will! He will know that you have come——"

"I told him that I meant to."

"And he will think you mean to punish me——"

"Yes."

"And—oh, don't you see?—he will come to protect me!"

The husband again put his hand timidly upon her arm.

"My dear," he said, "that is just what I wanted him to do—and what I feared he might not do if I told him that I wanted it. The worst thing about this whole tragedy is that it is unnecessary, a quite useless tragedy. I've thought a great deal since you spoke out plainly to me, and I am beginning to see—even I, who wish not to see it—that you were not so far from right; for if man's

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stupidity hadn't devised for itself a wholly crooked and muddled system for the conduct of his life, this sort of now common catastrophe simply couldn't happen. Listen."

He plucked at her sleeve, and she turned her pale face toward him.

"All my life," he went on, "I've been afraid of two things: old age and—something else. Perhaps I've learned better in the last few hours. I've tried to learn that only the laws of man are horrible and bad and that no natural law can be, if we face it for what it is, either repellent or wrong. Before, I tried to be young. I trained myself to be young. I denied my youth, believing that I could strengthen and prolong it. I decided that youth was a state of mind—that it could be retained by an effort of the will. I postponed love with that in mind, and I postponed too long. Then, when I never doubted myself, I married you."

He released her arm.

"I married you," he continued; "and so, from sinning against myself, I began to sin against another. Much that you said last night was right. I have been selfish. I have robbed you of your youth, and I've given you nothing in return but what a man might give to spoil a child or to flatter a mistress. It wasn't a marriage. I see that now. The white heat of passion fused together two pieces of greatly differing metals, but when the passion cooled, the welding wouldn't hold: the joint snapped. I thought I could hold you. Hold you—as if that could be love which must be held! I took a low advantage of your ignorance of life. I came to you, who knew nothing, and said: 'I will teach you'—but—I was giving you the half-sunshine of the sunset when your just portion was the blaze of noon. I was keeping youth from youth."

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Her large eyes were tender with tears.

"Do you mean it?" she asked. "Do you really mean—all this?"

"As I never meant anything else in my life. I violated nature and must pay the price."

Throughout all time and lands, he now felt, youth calls to youth, generation to generation, and not all the laws upon the statute-books of all the world can silence it.

"I've thought that you were ignorant," he was saying; "perhaps you were wiser than I. You are not breaking the law. You are fulfilling it. I was the one that was ignorant. I was the one that was wrong."

Out of sheer generosity, though her brain and heart cried assent to his every word, she tried to protest. But the youth in her heart clamoured that he was speaking truth.

"And so," he concluded, "now that I am sure that you truly love each other, I mean to step aside."

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She looked at him blankly.

"Step aside?" she repeated.

"I mean to make what reparation is possible: I must."

Muriel's face quivered.

"So that I—that we——" she started.

"So that you and von Klausen may marry."

"But we can't anyhow! Oh—that's the horror of it! That's why the thing can never be mended. In his religion there is no divorce. Marriage is a sacrament. Final. It lasts until one or the other dies."

Stainton frowned. It was a slight frown, rather of annoyance than of pain.

"Yes," he said. "I gave all my earlier life for my superstition, and now——"

"You see," she was running on, "in his faith, a marriage——"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted. "I know. They are flat-footed on that. I am only wondering——"

His speech dropped from the vocabulary of emotion to the trivial phrases of the colloquial.

"Look there!" he broke off.

Her eyes followed his pointing finger: in a little gap through the tree-tops they could see the path below, and up the path a figure was bounding: fevered, lithe, young.

Muriel clutched the parapet.

"It's Franz!" she said.

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"Yes, it's Franz," said Jim. "Just as I began talking to you, I thought I saw a motor scorching down the road toward the Hôtellerie. He must have left the car there and come right on."

"I know it is he. It is." She turned to her husband. "And, O, Jim, what shall I do?"

"See him, of course."

"Why? Why should we fight it all over again? There's no way out: we'll just have to go on forever."

There's nothing to do. Why should I fight it all over again? I'm tired—I'm so tired!"

Stainton looked at her long and earnestly. He did not speak, did not take her hand. He did nothing, he believed, that she could afterward translate into a good-bye.

"Nonsense!" he said, shortly. "You see him and try to bring him around to looking at marriage as the mere contract that the law has made it."

"There is no chance. The other view is part of his life—you've said so yourself."

Stainton smiled.

"Anyhow," he said, "there's no harm in trying. See him and make one more appeal. I'll cut around here and have a try at climbing to the top of the cliff. There's a path by the back way. The hotel proprietor spoke enough English to tell me there was a small chapel on the top of this cliff over our heads, and a wonderful view, from Toulon to Marseilles—Try it, Muriel—for my sake. I want to pay up. I don't pretend to be happy, but I want to pay up. So long! Good luck. And never say die!"

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He rattled out his careless words so swiftly that she could not answer. He scarcely reached their end before he raised his hat and darted down the steps.

She saw him disappear, and waited. She waited until von Klausen's young head and shoulders came above the steps.

"Franz!" she cried.

The Austrian hurried to her.

Stainton did not look back at them. He turned up the path that led around the rock, moving with the elastic step of a schoolboy going from his classroom to the playground. He almost ran up the wooded steep behind the cliff, and he was conscious of a familiar pride in the ease with which he made his way over the rapidly increasing angle of the mountainside. When he passed the timber line and came to the walls of bare rock along which the narrowed path wound more and more dangerously, his breath was shorter than it used to be in his climbing days in the Rockies, yet he moved swiftly. He ran along ledges that would make most men's heads swim, spurned stones that slipped beneath him, leaped from towering rocks to rocks that towered over hidden descents. He was driven by a mighty exaltation, by a stinging delight in the approach of finality. He was drunk with the most potent of sensations: the sensation that nothing could matter, that the worst to befall him was the measure of his desire. He was about to make the great sacrifice. He was about to fling himself from the cliff at the beetling chapel of St. Pilon. By ending his life in such a way that Muriel would suppose that end an accident, he was, for the woman he loved, about to court the death that he had all his life feared.

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He reached the mountain's bald top, and there flamed about him the panorama of the Chaîne de la Sainte Baume from Toulon to Marseilles, from the mountains to the sea. It was blue, intensely blue, under a full sun and in an air vibrant with health. The sky was a vivid blue, cloudless, the distant water was a blue that danced before his eyes. The summits of stone that fell away at his feet among cliffs and precipices were grey-blue. The deep valleys' greens were bluish green, and here and there, where he could barely distinguish the cottage of a forester or the hut of a charcoal-burner, there rose, incapable of attaining half-way to the awful height on which he stood, lazy wreaths of a smoke that was blue.

He was alone. Ahead of him and ten feet above stood the chapel: a single room, its third side open to the air, its walls seeming to totter on the edge of a tremendous nothingness. He walked resolutely around the chapel; found that, in reality, there was a ledge a yard wide between it and the drop; looked over and then instinctively fell on his knees and so upon his belly, thrusting his head over the awful descent.

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He saw below him—far, far below him, past perpendicular walls of blue rock—the narrow projection that was the parapet before the grotto of the Magdalen. He saw two figures beside the parapet. He saw, beyond the parapet, the precipice continue to the primæval forest, the trees of which presented a blurred mass of lancelike points to receive him. Beyond them he could not see. He grew dizzy; his stomach writhed.

He shut his eyes, but he saw more clearly with his eyes shut than open. He saw his father drawing the razor across his throat, and that father after the razor had been drawn across his throat. He saw his own body below there, this trembling body that he had so cared for, so believed in, impaled, broken, torn, crushed, an unrecognisable, pulpy inhuman thing....

Like some gigantic, foul-breathed bird of prey, the old fear swooped down upon him and rolled him over and over away from the edge, around the chapel, his face buried in the loose stones, his flanks heaving.

He lay there unable to rise, but able at last to reason. Reason pointed unflinchingly to self-destruction. He tried agonisedly to find one argument against it and could find none. He tried to aid reason, tried to reform the panic-mad ranks of his courage. He thought how wonderful was this thing which he had planned to do for Muriel, but with that thought his thoughts lost all order. He recalled how happy he had been with his wife before they came abroad, and at the same time realised that they could never be happy together again. He thought about the child

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that was to have been, and immediately remembered that it was at the first mention of the child that Muriel's love for him began to lessen. He made one more effort to lash himself toward fortitude. His father was a suicide, his child was murdered; he himself had nothing to live for, and his wife had nothing to live for if he lived. An unclean old man! After all his years of difficult restraints, after all the affection that he had given her, she had called him that. And she was right. He was an unclean old man. Was he to be also a coward?

He cried aloud. He dared not open his eyes, but, bathed in a sweat that he thought must be a sweat of blood, he tried to wriggle blindly and like a worm, back toward the mouth of the precipice. It cost him nearly all his strength, but he shoved himself forward and fell—a foot, over a stone.

He looked about him. He had been wriggling away from his death.

Stainton rose to his hands and knees. He headed about and crawled again to the chapel and around it. The journey seemed interminable, but he gained the edge, looked over—

One little push would do it; one leap.

His head swam. He dug his toes in the loose rocks before him until his fingers were cut and his palms ripped. With every nerve and muscle in his body, his body writhed away and rolled back to the front of the chapel and to safety.

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He lay before the open front of the chapel and knew that his adventure was over, that he could not do the thing that he had highly determined. He saw the future with clear eyes. He told himself that if he could not die for his wife, it must be that he did not love her; that to go back to her was, therefore, to chain himself to a woman that he did not love, to spoil the life of a man that did love her, to ruin the life of a woman that he himself had promised to love. It was useless to imagine that he might live and leave her, for he knew that if he left her she, unable to marry von Klausen, would marry no one and would come to what Stainton believed to be a worse estate. He knew that if he lived, he would have to live beside her and not with her, a despised protector. If passion should once or twice more flicker in its socket, it would be an animal passion that he detested and that would make Muriel and him detest each other.

The glamour of their miracle-love for each other was dispelled. They must henceforth see with straight eyes. She would look upon him as an unclean old man; he would see in her the death to his hope of physical immortality; and the three, von Klausen, Muriel, and he would share a secret, a secret of which they might never rid themselves. He, unwanted, why did he not go? He saw Muriel grow into a starved and thwarted woman; he saw himself sink into a terrified and lonely and loathed old age. His voice broke out in a shrill sob; but he knew that he would have to live. The old dread had conquered.

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He sat up. Possessed by a fear that the entire summit of the mountain might fall with him, he began to drag himself down the way that he had so carelessly ascended. It was a hideous descent. There were points in it that he could scarcely believe he had managed to pass. He came down in thrice the time that he had gone up, and he came down much of the way on his hands and knees, shaking like a frightened child.

They were standing by the parapet when he staggered, panting, toward them: Muriel's black eyes shining with tears, and a light in von Klausen's boyish face that made the husband wince.

"Why, Jim," said Muriel, "how muddy your clothes are. You look perfectly ridiculous."

Stainton was thinking:

"I must get her away. I must get myself away from this awful place. I must take her with me. I am afraid to be alone. I must get her away."

What he said was:

"Yes. Come away from that wall. Don't stand so near that wall! Yes, I had a little tumble."

They both started forward.

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"Are you hurt?" they asked, and they asked it together.

"No—no; I'm all right. Quite all right." He looked at Muriel. "You can't fix it up?"

She shook her head.

He looked at von Klausen.

"You"—he wet his lips with his thick tongue—"you won't change your prejudices?"

The Austrian flushed.

"I cannot change my religion," said he.

Stainton clumsily drew his watch from his pocket.

"Then," said Stainton, "you and I must be hurrying, Muriel. I'm sorry, Captain; but the bus leaves the Hôtellerie in half an hour, and we've got to hurry to catch it. Good-bye. Muriel, come on."

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Minor changes have been made to correct typesetters' errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author's words and intent.

The following spelling variants have been retained as printed:

"Lyon" and "Lyons"  
"nearby" and "near-by"  
"treetops" and "tree-tops"  
"sha'n't" and "shan't"

On page [333](#), an asterisk \* appears; however, there is no corresponding note in this book.

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