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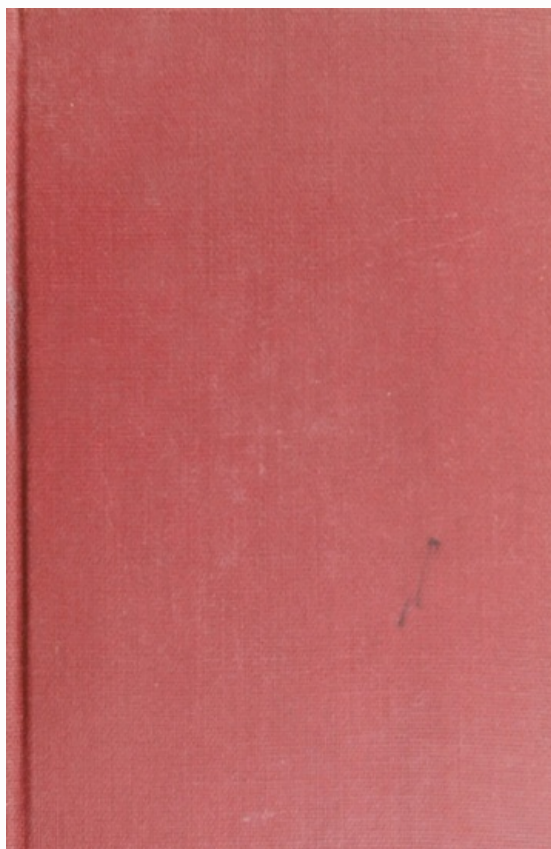
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**SYLVIA  
SCARLETT**  
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BOOKS BY  
COMPTON MACKENZIE  
SYLVIA SCARLETT  
PLASHERS MEAD

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK  
[ESTABLISHED 1817]

# THE EARLY LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SYLVIA SCARLETT

By COMPTON MACKENZIE ☞ ☞

Author of "PLASHERS MEAD" "SINISTER STREET" "CARNIVAL" ETC.

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**PRELUDE, CHAPTER: I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV**

## PRELUDE

### *Prelude*

AT six o'clock on the morning of Ash Wednesday in the year 1847, the Honorable Charles Cunningham sat sipping his coffee in the restaurant of the Vendanges de Bourgogne. He was somewhat fatigued by the exertions that as "lion" of the moment he had felt bound to make, exertions that had included a display of English eccentricity and had culminated in a cotillion at a noble house in the Faubourg St.-Germain, the daughter of which had been assigned to him by Parisian gossip as his future wife. Marriage, however, did not present itself to his contemplation as an urgent duty; and he sipped his coffee, reassured by the example of his brother Saxby, who, with the responsibility of a family succession, remained a bachelor. In any case, the notion of marrying a French girl was preposterous; he was not to be flattered into an unsuitable alliance by compliments upon his French. Certainly he spoke French uncommonly well, devilishly well for an Englishman, he told himself; and he stroked his whiskers in complacent meditation.

Charles Cunningham had arrived at the Vendanges de Bourgogne to watch that rowdy climax of Carnival, the

*descente de la Courtille*. And now through the raw air they were coming down from Belleville, all sorts of revelers in masks and motley and rags. The noise of tin trumpets and toy drums, of catcalls and cocoricots, of laughter and cheers and whistling, came nearer. Presently the road outside was thronged for the aristocrats of the Faubourg St.-Germain to alight from their carriages and mix with the mob. This was the traditional climax of Carnival for Parisian society: every year they drove here on Ash Wednesday morning to get themselves banged on the head by bladders, to be spurted with cheap scent and pelted with sugar-plums, and to retaliate by flinging down hot louis for the painful enrichment of the masses. The noise was for a time deafening; but gradually the cold light of morning and the melancholy Lenten bells cast a gloom upon the crowd, which passed on toward the boulevards, diminishing in sound and size at every street corner.

The tall, fair Englishman let himself be carried along by the exodus, thinking idly what excitable folk foreigners were, but conscious, nevertheless, of a warmth of intimacy that was not at all disagreeable, the kind of intimacy that is bestowed on a man by taking a pack of friendly dogs for a country walk. Suddenly he was aware of a small hand upon his sleeve, a small hand that lay there like a white butterfly; and, looking down, he saw a poke-bonnet garlanded with yellow rosebuds. The poke-bonnet was all he could see, for the wearer kept her gaze steadily on the road, while with little feet she mimicked his long strides. The ineffable lightness of the arm laid on his own, the joyous mockery of her footsteps, the sense of an exquisite smile beneath the poke-bonnet, and the airy tremor of invitation that fluttered from the golden shawl of Siamese crêpe about her shoulders tempted him to withdraw from the crowd at the first opportunity. Soon they were in a by-street, whence the clamor of Carnival slowly died away, leaving no sound upon the morning air but their footfalls and the faint whisper of her petticoats where she tripped along beside him.

Presently the poke-bonnet was raised; Charles Cunningham beheld his companion's face, a perfect oval, set with eyes of deepest brown, demurely passionate, eyes that in this empty street were all for him. He had never considered himself a romantic young man; when this encounter had faded to a mere flush upon the dreamy sky of the past, he was always a little scornful of his first remark, and apt to wonder how the deuce he ever came to make it.

"By Jove! *vous savez, vous êtes tout à fait comme un oiseau!*"

"*Eh, alors?*" she murmured, in a tone that was neither defiance nor archness nor indifference nor invitation, but something that was compounded of all four and expressed exactly herself. "*Eh, alors?*"

"*Votre nid est loin d'ici?*" he asked.

Nor did he blush for the guise of his speech at the time: afterward it struck him as most indecorously poetic.

"*Viens donc,*" she whispered.

"*Comment appelez-vous?*"

"*Moi, je suis Adèle.*"

"*Adèle quoi?*" he pressed.

"*Mais Adèle alors, tout simplement ça.*"

"*C'est un peu—vous savez—un peu.*" He made a sweep with his unoccupied arm to indicate the vagueness of it all.

"I love you," she trilled; deep down in her ivory throat emotion caught the trill and made of it a melody that set his heart beating.

"*Vraiment?*" he asked, very solemnly; then laying syllable upon syllable in a kind of amazed deliberation, as a child builds a tower of bricks, he began to talk to her in French.

"*Mais, comme tu parles bien,*" she told him.

"*Tu m'inspires,*" he murmured, hoarsely.

Afterward, when he looked back at the adventure, he awarded this remark the prize for folly.

The adventure did not have a long life; a week later Charles Cunningham was called back to England by the news of his brother's illness. Before Lent was out he had become the Earl of Saxby, who really had to think seriously of marriage and treat it with more respect than the Parisian gossip over which Charles Cunningham had idly mused at six o'clock of Ash Wednesday morning in the year 1847. As for Adèle, she met in May the owner of a traveling-booth, a widower called Bassompierre with a small son, who had enough of the gipsy to attract the irresponsible Adèle and enough of the bourgeois to induce her to marry him for the sake of a secure and solid future. She need not have troubled about her future, the deep-voiced Adèle; for just when November darkens to December she died in giving birth to Juliette. The gipsy in Albert Bassompierre accepted as his own daughter Juliette; the bourgeois in him erected a cross in the cemetery and put a wreath of immortelles in a glass case to lie on Adèle's tomb. Then he locked away the few pieces of jewelry that life had brought her, hung another daguerreotype beside the one of his first wife, and wrapped Juliette in a golden shawl of Siamese crêpe. Lightly the two daguerreotypes swung to and fro; and lightly rocked the cradle where the baby Juliette lay sleeping, while the caravan jolted southward along the straight French roads where the poplars seemed to be commenting to one another in the wind.

For eighteen years the caravan jolted along these roads, until young Edouard Bassompierre was old enough to play leading man throughout the repertory and thereby most abruptly plunge his predecessor into old age. At the same time Juliette was allowed to act the soubrettes; her father was too much afraid of the leading lady to play any tricks of suddenly imposed senility with her. It was, on the whole, a jolly life, this vagrancy from fair to fair of all the towns of France. It was jolly, when the performance was done, to gather in the tent behind the stage and eat chipped potatoes and drink red wine with all the queer people whose voices were hoarse with crying their wares all the day long.

Then came, one springtime, the fair at Compiègne. Business was splendid, for the Emperor was there to hunt the wild boar in the forest. Never had old Albert Bassompierre beaten his big drum so confidently at the entrance of his booth; never had Edouard captured so many young women's hearts; both of them were too much occupied with their own triumphs to notice the young officer who came every night to the play. The Emperor left Compiègne in April; when he departed, the young officer departed also, accompanied by Juliette.

"*Ah, la vache,*" cried old Bassompierre; "it's perhaps as well her mother didn't live, for she might have done the same."

"You should have let her play the lead," said Edouard.

"She can play lead in real life," replied old Bassompierre. "If she can," he added, fiercely.

But when Juliette wrote to him from Paris and told him how happy she was with her lover, the gipsy in Bassompierre drove out the bourgeois, and he sent his daughter her mother's jewelry and the golden shawl; but he kept the daguerreotype, for, after all, Juliette was not really his daughter and Adèle had really been his wife.

Three years passed. Juliette lived in a little house at Belleville with two baby girls called Elène and Henriette. When in after years she looked back to this time it seemed to her smothered in roses, the roses of an operatic scene. Everything, indeed, in retrospect was like that—the arrival of her lover in his gay uniform, the embowered kisses, the lights of Paris far below, the suppers on the veranda, the warm Sunday mornings, the two babies asleep on the lawn and their father watching them, herself before a glass and her lover's face seen over her shoulder, the sudden sharp embrace; all were heavy with the intolerable sense of a curtain that must fall. Then came the war; there was a hurried move down to stuffy apartments in Paris; ready money hastily got together by the young officer, who spoke confidently of the large sum it was, since, after all, the war would be over in a month and the Prussians have had their lesson; and at last a breathless kiss. The crowds surged cheering through the streets, the two babies screamed disapproval of their new surroundings, and

Juliette's lover was killed in the first battle; he had only time to scribble a few trembling lines:

*Mon adorée, je t'ai flanqué un mauvais coup. Pardonnez-moi. Mes dernières pensées sont pour toi. Adieu. Deux gros bécots aux bébés. J'ai parlé pour toi à mon père. Cherche argent—je t'embrasse follement follem—*

Yet when she received this letter, some impulse kept her from going to her lover's father. She could not bear the possibility of being made to realize that those debonair years of love were regarded by him as an intrigue to be solved by money. If André's mother had been alive, she might have felt differently; now she would not trouble a stricken family that might regard her tears as false; she would not even try to return to her own father. No doubt he would welcome her; but pride, all the strange and terrible pride that was henceforth to haunt Juliette's soul, forbade her.

It was impossible, however, to remain in Paris; and without any reason for her choice she took her babies to Lyon and settled down in rooms overlooking the Rhône, to await the end of the war. When she had paid the cost of the journey and bought herself the necessary mourning, she found she had nearly eleven thousand francs left; with care this could surely be made to last three years at least; in three years much might happen. As a matter of fact, much happened almost at once; for the beauty of Juliette, a lustrous and imperial beauty, caught the fancy of Gustave Lataille, who was conductor of the orchestra at one of the smaller theaters in Lyon. To snare his fancy might not have been enough; but when with her dowry she captured also his imagination, he married her. Juliette did not consider it wrong to marry this somber, withered, and uncommunicative man of forty, for whom she had neither passion nor affection. He struck her as essentially like most of the husbands she had observed hitherto; and she esteemed herself lucky not to have met such a one before she had been granted the boon of love. She must have inherited from that unknown father her domestic qualities; she certainly acquired none from Adèle. From him, too, may have come that pride which, however it may have found its chief expression in ideals of bourgeois respectability, was nevertheless a fine fiery virtue and supported her spirit to the very last.

Juliette and Lataille lived together without anything to color a drab existence. Notwithstanding his connection with the theater, Lataille had no bohemian tastes; once when his wife suggested, after a visit from her father, that there seemed no reason why she should not apply for an engagement to act, he unhesitatingly refused his permission; when she attempted to argue, he reminded her that he had given his name to Elène and Henriette, and she was silent. Henceforth she devoted herself to sewing, and brought into the world four girls in successive years—Françoise, Marie, Marguerite, and Valentine. The last was born in 1875, soon after the Latailles had moved to Lille, where Gustave had secured the post of conductor at the principal theater. Juliette welcomed the change, for it gave her the small house of her own which she had long wanted; moreover, nobody in Lille knew at first hand of the circumstances in which Gustave had married her, so that Elène and Henrietta could go to school without being teased about their mother's early lapse from the standards of conduct which she fervently desired they would adopt.

Unfortunately, the conductor had only enjoyed his advancement a year when he was struck down by a paralytic stroke. With six small children and a palsied husband upon her hands, Juliette had to find work. Partly from compassion for her ill-fortune, but chiefly because by now she was a most capable seamstress, the management of the theater engaged her as wardrobe mistress; and for five years Juliette sustained her husband, her children, and her house. They were years that would have rubbed the bloom from most women; but Juliette's beauty seemed to grow rather than diminish. Her personality became proverbial in the town of Lille, and though as wardroom mistress she was denied the public triumph of the footlights, she had nevertheless a fame of her own that was considered unique in the history of her profession. Her pride flourished on the deference that was shown her even by the management; between her beauty and her sharp tongue she achieved an authority that reached its height in the way she brought up her children. Their snowy pinafores, their trim stockings, their manners, and their looks were the admiration of the *quartier*; and when in the year 1881 Gustave Lataille died, the neatness of their new black dresses surprised even the most confirmed admirers of Madame Lataille's industry and taste. At no time could Juliette have seemed so beautiful as when, after the funeral, she raised her widow's veil and showed the attendant sympathizers a countenance unmarked by one tear of respectable emotion. She was far too proud to weep for a husband whom she had never loved and whose death was a relief; when the neighbors expressed astonishment at the absence of any outward sorrow, she flung out a challenge to fate:

"I have not reached the age of thirty-four, and brought up six children, and never once been late with so much as a ribbon, to cry for any man now. He'll be a wonderful man that will ever make me cry. Henriette, don't tug at your garter."

And as she stood there, with great brown eyes burning beneath a weight of lustrous black hair, she seemed of marble without and within.

Nevertheless, before six months had passed, Madame Lataille fell impetuously in love with a young English clerk of twenty-one, called Henry Snow; what is more, she married him. Nobody in Lille was able to offer a credible explanation of her behavior. People were willing to admit that his conduct was comprehensible, notwithstanding the fourteen years of her seniority; and it says much for the way Juliette had impressed her personality upon a dull

provincial world that Henry Snow's action should have been so immediately understood. Before the problem of her conduct, however, the world remained in perplexity. Financial considerations could not have supplied a motive; from all accounts the Englishman was unlikely to help; indeed, gossip said that even in his obscure position he had already had opportunities of showing that, such as it was, the position was better than he deserved and unlikely to be bettered in the future. Nor could his good looks have attracted her, for he was insignificant; and since Englishmen in the experience of Lille were, whatever their faults, never insignificant, the insignificance of Henry Snow acquired an active quality which contradicted its characterization and made him seem not merely unattractive, but positively displeasing. Nor could she have required some one to help in managing her six children; altogether the affair was a mystery, which gathered volume when the world began to realize the depth of the feeling that Henry Snow had roused in Juliette. All the world loves a lover, but only when it is allowed to obtrude itself upon the love. Juliette, absorbed by her emotion and the eternal jealousy of the woman who marries a man much younger than herself, refused to admit any spectators to marvel at the development of the mystery. She carried on her work as usual; but instead of maintaining her position as a figure she became an object of curiosity, and presently, because that curiosity was never gratified, an object of suspicion. The lover-loving world began to shake its head and calumny whispered everywhere its commentary; she could never have been a *femme propre*; this marriage must have been forced upon the young Englishman as the price of a five-year-old intrigue. When some defender of Juliette pointed out that the clerk had only been in Lille three years, that his name had never been connected with hers, and that in any case he was only twenty-one now, calumny retorted with a long line of Henry Snows; presently the story of Juliette's life with André Duchesnil was dragged to light, and by an infinite multiplication of whispers her career from earliest youth was established as licentious, mercenary, and cruel.

For a while Juliette was so much wrapped up in her own joy that she did not observe the steady withdrawal of popular esteem. Having made it clear to everybody that she wished to be left alone with her husband, she supposed she had been successful and congratulated herself accordingly, until one day a persistent friend, proof against Juliette's icy discouragement, drove into her that the *quartier* was pitying Henry Snow, that things were being said against her, and that the only way to put a stop to unkind gossip was to move about among the neighbors in more friendly fashion.

Gradually it dawned upon Juliette that her friend was the emissary of a universally accepted calumny, the voice of the *quartier*, the first to brave her, and only now rash enough to do so because she had public opinion at her back. This did not prevent Juliette from showing her counselor the door to the street, nor from slamming it so abruptly that a meter of stuff was torn from her skirt; yet when she went back to her room and picked up her needlework there came upon her with a shock the realization of what effect all this might have on Henry. If the world were pitying him now, it would presently be laughing; if he were laughed at, he would grow to hate her. Hitherto she had been so happy in her love that she had never stopped to consider anything or anybody. She remembered now Henry's amazement when, in the first tumultuous wave of passion dammed for so many years, she had refused to let herself be swept away; she recalled his faint hesitation when first she spoke of marriage and gave him to understand that without marriage she would not be his. Even then he must have foreseen the possibility of ridicule, and he had only married her because she had been able to seem so desirable. And she was still desirable; he was still enthralled; he was still vain of her love; yet how was the flattery of one woman to mitigate for a man the contempt of the crowd? Mercifully, he was an Englishman in a French town, therefore it would take longer for the popular feeling to touch him; but soon or late it would strike home to his vanity. Something must be devised to transfix him with the dignity of marriage. They must have a child; no father could do anything but resent and despise laughter that would be directed against his fatherhood. Juliette's wish was granted very shortly afterward; and when she told her husband of their expectation she held him close and looked deep into his eyes for the triumph she sought. Perhaps the fire in her own was reflected in his, for she released him from her embrace with a sigh of content.

Through the months of waiting Juliette longed for a boy. It seemed to her somehow essential for the retention of Henry's love that she should give him a boy; she could scarcely bear another girl, she who had brought into the world six girls. Much of Juliette's pride during those months was softened by her longing; she began once more to frequent the company of her neighbors in her zest for the least scrap of information that would help the fulfilment of it. There was no fantastic concoction she would not drink, nor any omen she would not propitiate. Half the saints in the calendar were introduced to her by ladies that knew them and vouched for the interest they would take in her pregnancy. Juliette never confided to anybody her reason for wanting a boy; and nobody suspected it, since half a dozen girls were enough to explain any woman's desire for a change. One adviser discovered in a tattered volume of obstetrical theory that when the woman was older than the man the odds were on a male child. Juliette's researches to gather confirmation of this remark led her into discussions about unequal marriages; and as the time of her confinement drew near she became gentler and almost anxious to discuss her love for Henry Snow, so much gentler and less reserved that those who had formerly whispered loudest and most falsely to one another now whispered sympathetically to her.

On the day before Juliette's confinement her husband came in from work very irritable.

"Here, when's this baby going to be born? I'm getting a bit annoyed. The men at the office are betting on its being a boy. It makes me look a fool, you know, that sort of thing."

She clutched his arm. "Which do you want, Henri? Tell me, *mon amour, mon homme*."

"I don't care which it is, as long as you're quick about it and this betting stops."

That night she was delivered of a girl, and because it was his she choked down the wild disappointment and loved Sylvia the best of all her seven girls.

**SYLVIA  
SCARLETT**

CHAPTER I

THE first complete memory of her father that Sylvia possessed was of following her mother out into the street on a clear moonlight night after rain and of seeing him seated in a puddle outside the house, singing an unintelligible song which he conducted with his umbrella. She remembered her mother's calling to him sharply, and how at last after numerous shakings and many reproaches he had walked into the house on all fours, carrying the umbrella in his mouth like a dog. She remembered that the umbrella was somehow wrong at the end, different from any other umbrella she had ever seen, so that when it was put into the hall-stand it looked like a fat old market woman instead of the trim young lady it should have resembled. She remembered how she had called her mother's attention to the loss of its feet and how her mother, having apparently realized for the first time her presence at the scene, had promptly hustled her up-stairs to bed with so much roughness that she had cried.

When Sylvia was older and had become in a way her mother's confidante, sitting opposite to her in the window to sew until it was no longer possible to save oil for the lamp, she ventured to recall this scene. Her mother had laughed at the remembrance of it and had begun to hum the song her father had sung:

La donna è mobile  
La da-di la-di-da.

"Shall I ever forget him?" Madame Snow had cried. "It was the day your sister Elène was married, and he had been down to the railway-station to see them off to Bruxelles."

Sylvia had asked what the words of the song meant, and had been told that they meant women were always running around.

"Where?" she had pressed.

"Some of them after men and others running away from them," her mother had replied.

"Shall I do that when I'm big?" Sylvia had continued. "Which shall I do?"

But it had been time to fetch the lamp and the question had remained unanswered.

Sylvia was five when her sister Elène was married; soon afterward Henriette married, too. She remembered that very well, because Marie went to join Françoise in the other bedroom, and with only Marguerite and Valentine left, they no longer slept three in a bed. This association had often been very uncomfortable because Marguerite would eat biscuits, the crumbs of which used to scratch her legs; and worse than the crumbs was the invariable quarrel between Marguerite and Valentine that always ended in their pinching each other across Sylvia, so that she often got pinched by mistake.

For several years Sylvia suffered from being the youngest of many sisters, and her mother's favorite. When she went to school, she asked other girls if it were not nicer to have brothers, but the stories she heard about the behavior of boys made her glad there were only girls in her house. She had practical experience of the ways of boys when at the age of eight she first took part in the annual *féerie* at the Lille theater. On her first appearance she played a monster; though all the masks were very ugly, she, being the smallest performer, always got the ugliest, and with the progress of the season the one that was most knocked about. In after years these performances seemed like a nightmare of hot cardboard-scented breath, of being hustled down the stone stairs from the dressing-room, of noisy rough boys shouting and scrambling for the best masks, of her legs being pinched, while she was waiting in the wings, by invisible boys, and once of somebody's twisting her mask right round as they made the famous entrance of the monsters, so that, being able to see nothing, she fell down and made all the audience laugh. Such were boys!

In contrast with scenes of discomfort and misery like these were the hours when she sat sewing with her mother in the quiet house. There would be long silences only broken by the sound of her mother's hand searching for new thread or needle in the work-basket, of clocks, of kettle on the hob, or of distant street cries. Then her mother would suddenly laugh to herself and begin a tale so interesting that Sylvia's own needlework would lie idly on her knee, until she was reproved for laziness, and silence again inclosed the room. Sometimes the sunset would glow through the window-panes upon her mother's work, and Sylvia would stare entranced at the great silken roses that slowly opened their petals for those swift fingers. Sometimes it would be a piece of lace that lay on her mother's lap, lace that in the falling dusk became light and mysterious as a cloud. Yet even these tranquil hours had storms, as on the occasion when her mother had been working all day at a lace cap which had been promised without fail to somebody at the theater who required it that night. At six o'clock she had risen with a sigh and given the cap to Sylvia to hold while she put on her things to take it down to the theater. Sylvia had stood by the fire, dreaming over the beauty of the lace; and then without any warning the cap had fallen into the fire and in a moment was ashes. Sylvia wished she could have followed the cap when she saw her mother's face of despair on realizing what had happened. It was then that for the first time she learned how much depended upon her mother's work; for during all that week, whenever she was sent out on an errand, she was told to buy only the half of everything, half the usual butter, half the usual sugar, and what was stranger still to go to shops outside the *quartier* at which Madame Snow never dealt. When she inquired the reason of this her mother asked her if she wanted all the *quartier* to know that they were poor and could only afford to buy half the usual amount that week.

Sylvia, when the first shame of her carelessness had died away, rather enjoyed these excursions to streets more remote, where amusing adventures were always possible. One Saturday afternoon in April Sylvia set out with a more than usually keen sense of the discoveries and adventures that might befall her. The first discovery was a boy on a step-ladder, polishing a shop window; and the second discovery was that she could stand on the curbstone and never once fail to spit home upon the newly polished glass. She did this about a dozen times, watching the saliva dribble down the pane and speculating with herself which dribble would make the longest journey. Regretfully she saw that the boy was preparing to descend and admire his handiwork, because two dribbles were still progressing slowly downward, one of which had been her original fancy for the prize of endurance. As she turned to flee, she saw on the pavement at her feet a golden ten-franc piece; she picked it up and grasping it tightly in her hot little hand ran off,

not forgetting, even in the excitement of her sudden wealth, to turn round at a safe distance and put out her tongue at the boy to mark her contempt for him, for the rest of his class, and for all their handiwork, especially that newly polished window-pane. Then she examined the gold piece and marveled at it, thinking how it obliterated the memory of that mother-o'-pearl button which only the other day she had found on the dust-heap and lost a few hours afterward.

It was a wonderful afternoon, an afternoon of unbridled acquisition, which began with six very rich cakes and ended with a case of needles for her mother that used up her last sou. Coming out of the needle-shop, her arms full of packages, she met a regiment of soldiers marching and singing. The soldiers expressed her triumphant mood, and Sylvia marched with them, joining in their songs. She had a few cakes left and, being grateful to the soldiers, she handed them round among them, which earned her much applause from passers-by. When the regiment had arrived at the barracks and her particular friends had all kissed her farewell and there were no more bystanders to smile their approbation, Sylvia thought it would be wise to do the shopping for her mother. She had marched farther than she realized with the soldiers; it was nearly dusk when she reached the grocer's where she was to buy the small quantity of sugar that was all that could be afforded this week. She made her purchase, and put her hand into the pocket of her pinafore for the money: the pocket was empty. Everything in the grocer's shop seemed to be tumbling about her in a great and universal catastrophe. She searched feverishly again; there was a small hole; of course her mother had given her a ten-franc piece, telling her to be very careful indeed of the change, which was wanted badly for the rent. She could not explain to the man what had happened and, leaving the packet on the counter, she rushed from the shop into the cruel twilight, choked by tearless sobs and tremors of apprehension. At first she thought of trying to find the shops where she had made her own purchases that she might recover such of the money as had not been eaten; but her nervous fears refused to let her mind work properly, and everything that had happened on this luckless afternoon seemed to have happened in a dream. It was already dark; all she could do was to run home, clutching the miserable toys to her heart and wondering if the needle-case could possibly allay a little, a very little, of her mother's anger.

Madame Snow began as soon as Sylvia entered the house by demanding what she had been doing to be so late in coming home. Sylvia stammered and was silent; stammered again and let fall all her parcels; then she burst into a flood of tears that voiced a despair more profound than she had ever known. When her mother at last extracted from Sylvia what had happened she, too, wept; and the pair of them sat filling the room with their sobs, until Henry Snow appeared upon the scene and asked if they had both gone mad.

His wife and daughter sobbed a violent negative. Henry stared at the floor littered with Sylvia's numerous purchases, but found there no answer to the riddle. He moved across to Juliette and shook her, urging her not to become hysterical.

"The last bit of money I had and the rent due on Monday!" she wailed.

"Don't you worry about money," said Henry, importantly. "I've had a bit of luck at cards," and he offered his wife a note. Moreover, when he heard the reason for all this commotion of grief, he laughed, said it might have happened to any one, congratulated Sylvia upon her choice of goods, declared it was time she began to study English seriously and vowed that he was the one to be her teacher, yes, by gad, he was, and that to-morrow morning being Sunday they would make a start. Then he began to fondle his wife, which embarrassed Sylvia, but nevertheless because these caresses so plainly delighted her mother, they consoled her for the disaster. So she withdrew to a darker corner of the room and played with the doll she had bought, listening to the conversation between her parents.

"Do you love me, Henri?"

"Of course I love you."

"You know that I would sacrifice the world for you? I've given you everything. If you love me still, then you must love me for myself—myself alone, *mon homme*."

"Of course I do."

"But I'm growing old," protested Juliette. "There are others younger than I. *Ah, Henri, amour de ma vie*, I'm jealous even of the girls. I want them all out of the house. I hate them now, except ours—ours, *ma poupée*."

Sylvia regarding her own doll could not help feeling that this was a most inappropriate name for her father; she wondered why her mother called him that and decided finally that it must be because he was shorter than she was. The evening begun so disastrously ended most cheerfully; when Françoise and Marie arrived back at midnight, they escaped even the mildest rebuke from their mother.

Sylvia's father kept his promise about teaching her English, and she was granted the great pleasure of being admitted to his room every evening when he returned from work. This room until now had always been a Bluebeard's chamber, not merely for Sylvia, but for every one else in the house. To be sure Sylvia had sometimes, when supper was growing cold, peeped in to warn her father of fleeting time, but it had always been impressed upon her that in no circumstances was she to enter the room; though she had never seen in these quick glimpses anything more exciting than her father sitting in his shirt-sleeves and reading in a tumble-down arm-chair, there had always been the sense of a secret. Now that she was made free of this apartment she perceived nothing behind the door but a bookcase fairly full of books, nothing indeed anywhere that seemed to merit concealment, unless it were some pictures of undressed ladies looking at themselves in a glass. Once she had an opportunity of opening one of the books and she was astonished, when her father came in and caught her, that he said nothing, for she felt sure that her mother would have been very angry if she had seen her reading such a book. She had blushed when her father found her; when he had said nothing and even laughed in a queer unpleasant sort of a way, she had blushed still more deeply. Yet whenever she had a chance she read these books afterward and henceforth regarded her father with an affectionate contempt which was often expressed too frankly to please her mother, who finally became so much irritated by it that she sent her away to Bruxelles to stay with Elène, her eldest married sister. Sylvia did not enjoy this visit very much, because her brother-in-law was always making remarks about her personal appearance, comparing it most unfavorably with his wife's. It seemed that Elène had recently won a prize for beauty at the Exposition, and though Sylvia would have been suitably proud of this family achievement in ordinary circumstances, this continual harping upon it to her own disadvantage made her wish that Elène had been ignobly defeated.

"Strange her face should be so round and yours such a perfect oval," Elène's husband would say. "And her lips

are so thin and her eyes so much lighter than yours. She's short, too, for her age. I don't think she'll ever be as tall as you. But of course every one can't be beautiful."

"Of course they can't," Sylvia snapped. "If they could, Elène might not have won the prize so easily."

"She's not a great beauty, but she has a tongue. And she's smart," her brother-in-law concluded.

Sylvia used to wonder why every one alluded to her tongue. Her mother had told her just before she was sent to Bruxelles that the priest had put too much salt on it when she was christened. She resolved to be silent in future; but this resolve reacted upon her nerves to such an extent that she wrote home to Lille and begged to be allowed to come back. There had been diplomacy in the way she had written to her father in English rather than to her mother in French. Such a step led her mother to suppose that she repented of criticizing her father; it also prevented her sister Elène from understanding the letter and perhaps writing home to suggest keeping her in Bruxelles. Sylvia was overjoyed at receiving an early reply from her mother bidding her come home, and sending stamps for her to buy a picture post-card album, which would be much cheaper in Belgium; she was enjoined to buy one picture post-card and put it in the album, so that the customs officials should not charge duty.

Sylvia had heard a great deal of smuggling and was thrilled by the illegal transaction, which seemed to her the most exciting enterprise of her life. She said good-by to Bruxelles without regret; clasping her album close, she waited anxiously for the train to start, thinking to herself that Elène only kept on putting her head into the carriage window to make stupid remarks because the compartment was crowded and she hoped some one would recognize her as the winner of the beauty competition at the Bruxelles Exposition.

At last the train started, and Sylvia settled down to the prospect of crossing the frontier with contraband. She looked at all the people in the carriage, thinking to herself what dangers she would presently encounter. It was almost impossible not to tell them, as they sat there in the stuffy compartment scattering crumbs everywhere with their lunches. Soon a pleasant woman in black engaged Sylvia in conversation by offering her an orange from a string-bag. It was very difficult to eat the orange and keep a tight hold of the album; in the end it fell on the floor, whereupon a fat old gentleman sitting opposite stooped over and picked it up for her. He had grunted so in making the effort that Sylvia felt she must reward him with more than thanks; she decided to divulge her secret and explain to him and the pleasant woman with the string-bag the history of the album. Sylvia was glad when all her other fellow-travelers paid attention to the tale, and she could point out that an album like this cost two francs fifty centimes in Lille, whereas in Bruxelles she had been able to buy it for two francs. Then, because everybody smiled so encouragingly, she unwrapped the album and showed the single picture post-card, discoursing upon the ruse. Everybody congratulated her, and everybody told one another anecdotes about smuggling, until finally a tired and anxious-looking woman informed the company that she was at that very moment smuggling lace to the value of more than two thousand francs. Everybody warned her to be very careful, so strict were the customs officials; but the anxious-looking woman explained that it was wrapped round her and that in any case she must take the risk, so much depended upon her ability to sell this lace at a handsome profit in France.

When the frontier was reached Sylvia alighted with the rest of the travelers to pass through the customs, and with quickening heart she presented herself at the barrier, her album clutched tightly to her side. No, she had nothing to declare, and with a sigh of relief at escape from danger she saw her little valise safely chalked. When she passed through to take her seat in the train again, she saw a man whom she recognized as a traveler from her own compartment that had told several anecdotes about contraband. He was talking earnestly now to one of the officials at the barrier and pointing out the anxious woman, who was still waiting to pass through.

"I tell you she had two thousand francs' worth of lace wrapped round her. She admitted it in the train."

Sylvia felt her legs give way beneath her when she heard this piece of treachery. She longed to cry out to the woman with the lace that she had been betrayed, but already she had turned deathly pale at the approach of the officials. They were beckoning her to follow them to a kind of cabin, and she was moving toward it hopelessly. It was dreadful to see a poor woman so treated, and Sylvia looked round to find the man who had been the cause of it, but he had vanished.

Half an hour afterward the woman of the lace wearily climbed into the compartment and took her seat with the rest; her eyes were red and she was still weeping bitterly. The others asked what had happened.

"They found it on me," she moaned. "And now what shall I do? It was all we had in the world to pay the mortgage on our house. My poor husband is ill, very ill, and it was the only way to save him. I should have sold that lace for four thousand francs, and now they have confiscated it and we shall be fined one thousand francs. We haven't any money. It was everything—everything. We shall lose our house and our furniture, and my husband will die. Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*"

She rocked backward and forward in her grief; nothing that any one could say comforted her. Sylvia told how she had been betrayed; everybody execrated the spy and said how careful one should be to whom one spoke when traveling; but that did not help the poor woman, who sobbed more and more despairingly.

At last the train came to its first stop in France, and the man that had denounced the poor woman suddenly jumped in, as they were starting again, and took his old seat. The fat gentleman next to Sylvia swelled with indignation; his veins stood out, and he shouted angrily at the man what a rascal he was. Everybody in the carriage joined in abusing him; and the poor woman herself wailed out her sad story and reproached him for the ruin he had brought upon her. As for Sylvia, she could not contain herself, but jumped up and with all her might kicked him on the shins, an action which made the fat gentleman shout: "*Bravo! Vas-y! Encore, la gosse! Bravo! Bis! Bis!*"

When the noise had subsided the man began to speak.

"I regret infinitely, madame, the inconvenience to which I was unfortunately compelled to put you, but the fact is that I myself was carrying diamonds upon me to the value of more than two hundred thousand francs."

He suddenly took out a wallet from his pocket and emptied the stones into his hand, where they lay sparkling in the dusty sunshine of the compartment. Everybody was silent with surprise for a moment; when they began to abuse him again, he trickled the diamonds back into the wallet and begged for attention.

"How much have you lost, madame?" he inquired, very politely.

The woman of the lace poured forth her woes for the twentieth time.

"Permit me to offer you these notes to the value of six thousand francs," he said. "I hope the extra thousand will recompense you for the temporary inconvenience to which I was unfortunately compelled to put you. Pray accept my



deepest apologies, but at the same time let me suggest greater discretion in future. Yet we are all human, are we not, monsieur?" he added, turning to the fat gentleman next to Sylvia. "Will you be very much surprised when I tell you that I have never traveled from Amsterdam but I have found some indiscreet fellow-traveler that has been of permanent service to me at temporary inconvenience to himself. This time I thought I was going to be unlucky, for this was the last compartment left; fortunately that young lady set a bad example."

He smiled at Sylvia.

This story, when she told it at home, seemed to make a great impression upon her father, who maintained that the stranger was a fool ever to return to the carriage.

"Some people seem to think money's made to throw into the gutter," he grumbled.

Sylvia was sorry about his point of view, but when she argued with him he told her to shut up; later on that same evening he had a dispute with his wife about going out.

"I want to win it back," he protested. "I've had a run of bad luck lately. I feel to-night it's going to change. Did I tell you I saw the new moon over my right shoulder, as I came in?"

"So did I," said his wife. "But I don't rush off and gamble away other people's money for the sake of the moon."

"You saw it, too, did you?" said Henry, eagerly. "Well, there you are!"

The funny thing was that Henry was right; he did have a run of good luck, and the house became more cheerful again. Sylvia went on with her English studies; but nowadays even during lessons her father never stopped playing cards. She asked him once if he were telling his fortune, and he replied that he was trying to make it. "See if you can pick out the queen," he would say. And Sylvia never could, which made her father chuckle to himself with pleasure. About this time, too, he developed a habit of playing with a ten-centime piece. Whenever he or any one else was talking, he used to fidget with this coin; in the middle of something important or interesting it used to jingle down on the floor, and everybody had to go on hands and knees to search for it. This habit became so much the intrinsic Henry Snow that Sylvia could never think of him without that ten-centime piece sliding over his long mobile hands, in and out of his prehensile fingers: and though with the progress of time he ceased to drop the coin very often, the restless motion always irritated her. When Sylvia was eleven her uncle Edouard came to Lille with his caravan and brought the news of the death of her grandfather. She was not much impressed by this, but the caravan and the booth delighted her; and when her uncle asked if he might not take her away with him on a long tour through the south of France, she begged to be allowed to go. Her mother had so often held her spellbound by tales of her own wandering life that, when she seemed inclined to withhold her permission, Sylvia blamed her as the real origin of this longing to taste the joys of vagrancy, pleading so earnestly that at last her mother gave way and let her go.

Uncle Edouard and Aunt Elise, who sat in the box outside the booth and took the money, were both very kind to Sylvia, and since they had no children of their own, she was much spoiled. Indeed, there was not a dull moment throughout the tour; for even when she went to bed, which was always delightfully late, bed was really a pleasure in a caravan.

In old Albert Bassompierre's days the players had confined themselves to the legitimate drama; Edouard had found it more profitable to tour a variety show interspersed with one-act farces and melodrama. Sylvia's favorites in the company were Madame Perron, the wife of the *chanteur grivois*, and Blanche, a tall, fair, noisy girl who called herself a *diseuse*, but who usually sang indecent ballads in a powerful contralto. Madame Perron was Sylvia's first attraction, because she had a large collection of dolls with which she really enjoyed playing. She was a *femme très-propre*, and never went farther with any of her admirers in the audience than to exact from him the gift of a doll.

"*Voilà ses amours manqués*," her husband used to say with a laugh.

In the end Sylvia found her rather dull, and preferred to go tearing about the country with Blanche, who, though she had been a scullery-maid in a Boulogne hotel only a year ago, had managed during her short career on the stage to collect more lovers than Madame Perron had collected dolls. She had a passion for driving. Sylvia could always be sure that on the morning after their opening performance in any town a wagonette or dog-cart would be waiting to take them to some neighboring village, where a jolly party would make a tremendous noise, scandalize the inhabitants, and depart, leaving a legacy of unpopularity in the district for whichever of Blanche's lovers had paid for the entertainment with his purse and his reputation. Once they arrived at a village where a charity bazaar was being held under the direction of the *curé*. Blanche was presented to him as a distinguished actress from Paris who was seeking peace and recreation in the depths of the country. The *curé* asked if it would be presuming too far on her good nature to give them a taste of her art in the cause of holy charity, a speech perhaps from Corneill or Racine. Blanche assented immediately and recited a piece stuffed so full of spicy argot that the rustic gentility understood very little of it, though enough to make them blush—all except the priest, that is, who was very deaf and asked Blanche, when she had finished, if it were not a speech from Phèdre she had declaimed, thanking her very earnestly for the pleasure she had given his simple parish folk, a pleasure, alas, which he regretted he had not been able to enjoy as much as he should have enjoyed it before he became deaf.

On another occasion they drove to see the ruins of an ancient castle in Brittany, and afterward went down into the village to drink wine in the garden of the inn, where an English family was sitting at afternoon tea. Sylvia stared curiously at the two little girls who obeyed their governess so promptly and ate their cakes so mincingly. They were the first English girls she had ever seen, and she would very much have liked to tell them that her father was English, for they seemed to want cheering up, so solemn were their light-blue eyes and so high their boots. Sylvia whispered to Blanche that they were English, who replied that so much was very obvious, and urged Sylvia to address them in their native tongue; it would give them much pleasure, she thought. Sylvia, however, was too shy, so Blanche in her loudest voice suddenly shouted:

"Oh yes! T'ank you! I love you! All right! You sleep with me? Goddambleudi!"

The English family looked very much shocked, but the governess came to their rescue by asking in a thin throaty voice for the "attition," and presently they all walked out of the garden. Blanche judged the English to be a dull race, and, mounting on a table, began a rowdy dance. It happened that, just when the table cracked, the English governess came back for an umbrella she had left behind, and that Blanche, leaping wildly to save herself from falling, leaped on the governess and brought her to the ground in a general ruin of chairs and tables. Blanche picked up the victim and said that it was all very *rigolo*, which left miss as wise as she was before, her French not extending beyond the tea-table and the chaster portions of a bedroom. Blanche told Sylvia to explain to miss that she had displayed

nothing more in her fall than had given much pleasure to all the world. Sylvia, who really felt the poor governess required such practical consolation, translated accordingly, whereat Miss became very red and, snatching her umbrella, walked away muttering, "Impertinent little gipsy." When Blanche was told the substance of her last remark, she exclaimed, indignantly:

*"Elles sont des vrais types, vous savez, ces gonzesses. Mince, alors! Pourquoi s'emballer comme ça? Elle portait un pantalon fermé! Quelle race infecte, ces Anglais! Moi, je ne peux pas les souffrir."*

Sylvia, listening to Blanche's tirade, wondered if all the English were like that. She thought of her father's books, and decided that life in France must have changed him somehow. Then she called to mind with a shiver the solemn light-blue eyes of the little girls. England must be a cold sort of a place where nobody ever laughed; perhaps that was why her father had come away. Sylvia decided to remain in France, always in a caravan if possible, where no English miss could poke about with bony fingers in one's bread and butter.

Sylvia acquired a good deal of worldly wisdom from being so continuously in the society of Blanche, and for a child of eleven she was growing up somewhat rapidly. Yet it would have been hard to say that the influence of her noisy friend was hurtful, for it never roused in Sylvia a single morbid thought. Life in those days presented itself to her mostly as an amusing game, a game that sometimes caused tears, but tears that were easily dried, because, after all, it was only a game. Such was the situation created on one occasion by the unexpected arrival of Blanche's *fiancé* from his regiment, the 717th of the line.

The company was playing at St.-Nazaire at the time, and Louis Moreau telegraphed from Nantes that he had been granted a *congé* of forty-eight hours.

"*Mince, alors!*" cried Blanche to Sylvia. "And, you know, I don't want to give him up, because he has thirty thousand francs and he loves me *à la folie*. We are only waiting till he has finished his military service to get married. But I don't want him here. First of all, I have a very *chic* lover, who has a *poignon fou* and doesn't care how much he spends, and then the lover of my heart is here."

Sylvia protested that she had heard the last claim too often.

"No, but this is something much greater than a *béguin*. It is real love. *Il est très trr-ès-beau garçon, tu sais*. And, *chose très-drôle*, he also is doing his military service here. *Tout ça ne se dessine pas du tout bien, tu sais, mais pas du tout, tu comprends! Moi, je ne suis pas veineuse. Ah, non, alors, c'est le comble!*"

Blanche had been sufficiently agile to extract the usual wagonette and pair of horses from the *chic* lover to whom she had introduced her real lover, a tall cuirassier with fierce mustaches, as her brother; but the imminent arrival of Louis was going to spoil all this, because Louis knew well that she did not possess a relative in the world, in fact, as Blanche emphasized, her solitary position had been one of her charms.

"You'll have to get rid of Monsieur Beaujour." This was the rich lover.

"And lose my horses? *Ah, non, alors!*"

"Well, then you'll have to tell Marcel he mustn't come near you until Louis has gone."

"And see him go off with that Jeanne at the Clair de la Lune Concert!"

"Couldn't Louis pay for the horses?" suggested Sylvia.

"I'm not going to let him waste his money like that; besides, he'll only be here two nights. *C'est assommant, tu sais,*" Blanche sighed.

In the middle of the discussion Louis arrived, a very short little *sous-officier* with kind watery eyes and a mustache that could only be seen properly out of doors. Louis had not had more than five minutes with his *fiancée* before M. Beaujour drove up with the wagonette and pair. He was the son of a rich shipping agent in St.-Nazaire, with a stiff manner that he mistook for evidence of aristocratic descent, and bad teeth that prevented him from smiling more than he could help.

"I shall tell him you're my brother," said Blanche, quickly. Louis began to protest.

"*Pas de boniment,*" Blanche went on. "I must be pleasant to strangers in front. Madame Bassompierre insists on that, and you know I've never given you any cause to be really jealous."

M. Beaujour looked very much surprised when Blanche presented Louis to him as her brother; Sylvia, remembering the tall cuirassier with the fierce mustaches that had also been introduced as Blanche's brother, appreciated his sensations. However, he accepted the relationship and invited Louis to accompany them on the drive, putting him with Sylvia and seating himself next Blanche on the box; Louis, who found Sylvia sympathetic, talked all the time about the wonderful qualities of Blanche, continually turning round to adore her shapely back.

M. Beaujour invited Louis to a supper he was giving that evening in honor of Blanche, and supposed, perhaps a little maliciously, that Monsieur would be glad to meet his brother again, who was also to be of the party. Louis looked at Blanche in perplexity; she frowned at him and said nothing.

That supper, to which M. and Mme. Perron with several other members of the company were invited, was a very restless meal. First, Blanche would go out with the host while Marcel and Louis glared alternately at each other and the door; then she would withdraw with Louis, while M. Beaujour and Marcel glared and fidgeted; finally she would disappear with Marcel, once for such a long time that Sylvia grew nervous and went outside to find her. Blanche was in tears; Marcel was stalking up and down the passage, twisting his fierce mustaches and muttering his annoyance. Sylvia was involved in a bitter discussion about the various degrees of Blanche's love, and in the end Blanche cried that her whole life had been shattered, and rushed back to the supper-room. Sylvia took this opportunity of representing Blanche's point of view to Marcel, and so successful was she with her tale of the emotional stress caused by the conflict of love with prudence that finally Marcel burst into tears, called down benedictions upon Sylvia's youthful head, and rejoined the supper-party, where he drank a great quantity of red wine and squeezed Blanche's hand under the table for the rest of the evening.

Sylvia, having been successful once, now invited Louis to accompany her outside. To him she explained that Marcel loved Blanche madly, that she, the owner, as Louis knew, of a melting heart, had been much upset by her inability to return his love, and that Louis must not be jealous, because Blanche loved only him. Louis's eyes became more watery than ever, and he took his seat at table again, a happy man until he drank too much wine and had to retire permanently from the feast. Finally Sylvia tackled M. Beaujour, and, recognizing that he was probably tired of lies, told him the truth of the situation, leaving it to him as an *homme supérieur* to realize that he could only be an

episode in Blanche's life and begging him not to force his position that night. M. Beaujour could not help being flattered by this child's perception of his superiority, and for the rest of the entertainment played the host in a manner that was, as Madame Perron said, *très très-correcte*.

However, amusing evenings like this came to an end for Sylvia when once more the caravan returned to Lille. Her uncle and aunt had so much enjoyed her company that they proposed to Madame Snow to adopt Sylvia as their own daughter. Sylvia, much as she loved her mother, would have been very glad to leave the house at Lille, for it seemed, when she saw it again, poverty-stricken and pinched. There was only Valentine now left of her sisters, and her mother looked very care-worn. Her father, however, declined most positively to listen to the Bassompierres' proposal, and was indeed almost insulting about it. Madame Snow wearily bade Sylvia say no more, and the caravan went on its way again. Sylvia wondered whether life in Lille had always been as dull in reality as this, or if it were dull merely in contrast with the gay life of vagrancy. Everybody in Lille seemed to be quarreling. Her mother was always reproaching Valentine for being late, and her father for losing money, and herself for idleness in the house. She tried to make friends with her sister, but Valentine was suspicious of her former intimacy with their mother, and repelled her advances. The months dragged on, months of eternal sewing, eternal saving, eternal nagging, eternal sameness. Then one evening, when her mother was standing in the kitchen, giving a last glance at everything before she went down to the theater, she suddenly threw up her arms, cried in a choking voice, "Henri!" and collapsed upon the floor. There was nobody in the house except Sylvia, who, though she felt very much frightened, tried for a long time, without success, to restore her mother to consciousness. At last her father came in and bent over his wife.

"Good God, she's dead!" he exclaimed, and Sylvia broke into a sweat of horror to think that she had been alone in the twilight with something dead. Her father struggled to lift the body on the sofa, calling to Sylvia to come and help him. She began to whimper, and he swore at her for cowardice. A clock struck and Sylvia shrieked. Her father began to drag the body toward the sofa; playing-cards fell from his sleeves on the dead woman's face.

"Didn't she say anything before she died?" he asked. Sylvia shook her head.

"She was only forty-six, you know," he said; in and out of his fingers, round and round his hand, slipped the ten-centime piece.

For some time after his wife's death Henry Snow was inconsolable, and his loudly expressed grief had the effect of making Sylvia seem hard, for she grew impatient with him, especially when every week he used to sell some cherished piece of furniture. She never attempted to explain her sentiments when he accused her of caring more for furniture than for her dead mother; she felt it would be useless to explain them to him, and suffered in silence. What Sylvia found most inexplicable was the way in which her father throve on sorrow and every day seemed to grow younger. This fact struck her so sharply that one day she penetrated the hostility that had been gathering daily between her and Valentine and asked her sister if she had observed this queer change. Valentine got very angry; demanded what Sylvia meant; flung out some cruel sneers; and involved her in a scene with her father, who charged her with malice and underhanded behavior. Sylvia was completely puzzled by the effect of her harmless observation, and supposed that Valentine, who had always been jealous of her, had seized the opportunity to make further mischief. She could never understand why Valentine was jealous of her, because Valentine was really beautiful, and very much like her mother, enviable from any point of view, and even now obviously dearer to her stepfather than his own daughter. She would have liked to know where the caravan was now; she was sure that her father would no longer wish to forbid her adoption by Uncle Edouard and Aunt Elise.

The house grew emptier and emptier of furniture; Sylvia found it so hard to obtain any money from her father for current expenses that she was often hungry. She did not like to write to any of her older sisters, because she was afraid that Valentine would make it appear that she was in the wrong and trying to stir up trouble. Summer passed into autumn, and with the lengthening darkness the house became unbearably still; neither her father nor her sister was ever at home; even the clocks had now all disappeared. Sylvia could not bear to remain indoors; for in her nervous, hungry state old childish terrors were revived, and the great empty loft at the top of the house was once again inhabited by that one-legged man with whose clutches her mother used to frighten her when naughty long ago. There recurred, too, a story told by her mother on just such a gusty evening as these, of how, when she first came to Lille, she had found an armed burglar under her bed, and of how the man had been caught and imprisoned. Even her mother, who was not a nervous woman, had been frightened by his threats of revenge when he should be free again, and once when she and her mother were sewing together close to the dusky window her mother had fancied she had seen him pass the house, a large pale man in a dark suit. Supposing he should come back now for his revenge? And above all these other terrors was the dread of her mother's ghost.

Sylvia took to going out alone every evening, whether it rained or blew, to seek in the streets relief from the silence of the desolate house. Loneliness came to seem to her the worst suffering imaginable, and the fear of it which was bred during these months haunted her for years to come.

In November, about half past eight of a windy night, Sylvia came back from one of her solitary walks and found her father sitting with a bottle of brandy in the kitchen. His face was haggard; his collar was loose; from time to time he mopped his forehead with a big blue handkerchief and stared at himself in a small cracked shaving-glass that he must have brought down from his bedroom. She asked if he were ill, and he told her not to worry him, but to go out and borrow a railway time-table.

When Sylvia returned she heard Valentine's angry voice in the kitchen, and waited in the passage to know the cause of the dispute.

"No, I won't come with you," Valentine was saying. "You must be mad! If you're in danger of going to prison, so much the worse for you. I've got plenty of people who'll look after me."

"But I'm your stepfather."

Valentine's laugh made Sylvia turn pale.

"Stepfather! Fine stepfather! Why, I hate you! Do you hear? I hate you! My man is waiting for me now, and he'll laugh when he hears that a convict wants his step-daughter to go away with him. My mother may have loved you, but I'd like her to see you now. *L'amour de sa vie. Son homme! Sa poupée, sa poupée! Ah, mais non alors! Sa poupée!*"

Sylvia could not bear any longer this mockery of her mother's love, and, bursting into the kitchen, she began to abuse Valentine with all the vulgar words she had learned from Blanche.

Valentine caught her sister by the shoulders and shook her violently:

"Tu seras bien avec ton père, sale gosse!"

Then she smacked her cheek several times and left the house.

Sylvia flung her arms round her father.

"Take me with you," she cried. "You hate her, don't you? Take me, father."

Henry rose and, in rising, upset the bottle of brandy.

"Thank God," he said, fervently. "My own daughter still loves me."

Sylvia perceived nothing ludicrous in the tone of her father's speech, and happy tears rose to her eyes.

"See! here is the time-table. Must we go to-night? Sha'n't we go to-night?"

She helped her father to pack; at midnight they were in the train going north.

## CHAPTER II

THE amount of brandy that Henry Snow had drunk to support what he called his misfortune made him loquacious for the first part of the journey. While he and Sylvia waited during the night at a railway junction, he held forth at length not merely upon the event that was driving him out of France, but generally upon the whole course of his life. Sylvia was glad that her father treated her as if she were grown up, because having conceived for him a kind of maternal solicitude, not so much from pity or affection as from the inspiration to quit Lille forever which she gratefully owed to his lapse, she had no intention of letting him re-establish any authority over herself. His life's history, poured forth while they paced the dark platform or huddled before the stove in the dim waiting-room, confirmed her resolve.

"Of course, when I first got that job in Lille it seemed just what I was looking for. I'd had a very scrappy education, because my father, who was cashier in a bank, died, and my mother, who you're a bit like—I used to have a photograph of her, but I suppose it's lost, like everything else—my mother got run over and killed coming back from the funeral. There's something funny about that, you know. I remember your mother laughed very much when I told her about it once. But I didn't laugh at the time, I can tell you, because it meant two aunts playing battledore and shuttlecock. Don't interrupt, there's a good girl. It's a sort of game. I can't remember what it is in French. I dare say it doesn't exist in France. You'll have to stick to English now. Good old England, it's not a bad place. Well, these two aunts of mine grudged every penny they spent on me, but one of them got married to a man who knew the firm I worked for in Lille. That's how I came to France. Where are my aunts now? Dead, I hope. Don't you fret, Sylvia, we sha'n't trouble any of our relations for a long time to come. Then after I'd been in France about four years I married your mother. If you ask me why, I can't tell you. I loved her; but the thing was wrong somehow. It put me in a false position. Well, look at me! I'm only thirty-four now. Who'd think you were my daughter?"

"And while we're talking on serious subjects, let me give you a bit of advice. Keep off jealousy. Jealousy is hell; and your mother was jealous. Well—Frenchwomen are more jealous than Englishwomen. You can't get over that fact. The scenes I've had with her. It was no good my pointing out that she was fourteen years older than me. Not a bit of good. It made her worse. That's why I took to reading. I had to get away from her sometimes and shut myself up. That's why I took to cards. And that's where your mother was wrong. She'd rather I gambled away her money, because it's no use to pretend that it wasn't her money, than go and sit at a café and perhaps observe—mind you, simply observe—another woman. I used to drink a bit too much when we were first married, but it caused such rows that I gave that up. I remember I broke an umbrella once, and you'd really have thought there wasn't another umbrella in the whole world. Why, that little drop of brandy I drank to-night has made me feel quite funny. I'm not used to it. But there was some excuse for drinking to-night. I've had runs of bad luck before, but anything like these last two months I've never had in my life. The consequence was I borrowed some of my salary in advance without consulting anybody. That's where the manager had me this afternoon. He couldn't see that it was merely borrowing. As a matter of fact, the sum wasn't worth an argument; but he wasn't content with that; he actually told me he was going to examine—well—you wouldn't understand if I tried to explain to you. It would take a commercial training to understand what I've been doing. Anyway, I made up my mind to make a bolt for it. Now don't run away with the notion that the police will be after me, because I very much hope they won't. In fact, I don't think they'll do anything. But the whole affair gave me a shock and Valentine's behavior upset me. You see, when your mother was alive if I'd had a bad week she used to help me out; but Valentine actually asked me for money. She accused me of all sorts of things which, luckily, you're too young to understand; and I really didn't like to refuse her when I'd got the money.

"Well, it's been a lesson to me and I tell you I've missed your mother these last months. She was jealous; she was close; she had a tongue; but a finer woman never lived, and I'm proud of her. She used to wish you were a boy. Well, I don't blame her. After all, she'd had six girls, and what use are they to anybody? None at all. They might as well not exist. Women go off and get married and take somebody else's name, and it's finished. There's not one of your sisters that's really stayed in the family. A selfish crowd, and the worst of the lot was Valentine. Yes, you ought to have been a boy. I'll tell you what, it wouldn't be a bad idea if you *were* a boy for a bit. You see, in case the French police make inquiries, it would be just as well to throw them off the scent; and, another thing, it would be much easier for me till I find my feet again in London. Would you like to be a boy, Sylvia? There's no reason against it that I can see, and plenty of reasons for it. Of course it means cutting off your hair, but they say that's a very good thing for the hair once in a way. You'll be more free, too, as a boy, and less of a responsibility. There's no doubt a girl would be a big responsibility in London."

"But could I be a boy?" Sylvia asked. "I'd like to be a boy if I could. And what should I be called?"

"Of course you could be a boy," her father affirmed, enthusiastically. "You were always a bit of a *garçon manqué*, as the French say. I'll buy you a Norfolk suit."

Sylvia was not yet sufficiently unsexed not to want to know more about her proposed costume. Her father pledged his word that it would please her; his description of it recalled the dress that people in Lille put on to go shooting sparrows on Sunday.

"*Un sporting?*" Sylvia queried.

"That's about it," her father agreed. "If you had any scissors with you, I'd start right in now and cut your hair."

Sylvia said she had scissors in her bag; and presently she and her father retired to the outer gloom of the junction, where, undisturbed by a single curious glance, Sylvia's curls were swept away by the wind.

"I've not done it quite so neatly as I might," said her father, examining the effect under a wavering gas-jet. "I'll have you properly cropped to-morrow at a hairdresser's."

Sylvia felt cold and bare round the neck, but she welcomed the sensation as one of freedom. How remote Lille seemed already—utterly, gloriously far away! Now arose the problem of her name.

"The only boy's name I can think of that's anything like Sylvia is Silas, and that's more Si than Sil. Wait a bit. What about Silvius? I've seen that name somewhere. Only, we'll call you Sil for short."

"Why was I ever called Sylvia?" she asked.

"It was a fancy of your mother's. It comes in a song called '*Plaisir d'amour*.' And your mother liked the English way of saying it. I've got it. Sylvester! Sylvester Snow! What do you want better than that?"

When the train approached Boulogne, Henry Snow gave up talking and began to juggle with the ten-centime piece; while they were walking along to the boat he looked about him furtively. Nobody stopped them, however; and with the kind of relief she had felt when she had brought her album safely over the frontier Sylvia saw the coast of France recede. There were many English people on the boat, and Sylvia watched them with such concentration that several elderly ladies at whom she stared in turn thought she was waiting for them to be sick, and irritably waved her away. The main impression of her fellow-travelers was their resemblance to the blind beggars that one saw sitting outside churches. She was tempted to drop a sou in one of the basins, but forbore, not feeling quite sure how such humor would appeal to the English. Presently she managed to engage in conversation an English girl of her own age, but she had not got far with the many questions she wanted to ask when her companion was whisked away and she heard a voice reproving her for talking to strange little girls. Sylvia decided that the strangeness of her appearance must be due to her short hair, and she longed for the complete transformation. Soon it began to rain; the shores of that mysterious land to which she actually belonged swam toward her. Her father came up from below, where, as he explained, he had been trying to sleep off the effects of a bad night. Indeed, he did not recover his usual jauntiness until they were in the train, traveling through country that seemed to Sylvia not very different from the country of France. Would London, after all, prove to be very different from Lille? Then slowly the compartment grew dark, and from time to time the train stopped.

"A fog," said her father, and he explained to her the meaning of a London fog.

It grew darker and darker, with a yellowish-brown darkness that was unlike any obscurity she had ever known.

"Bit of luck," said her father. "We sha'n't be noticed in this. Phew! It is thick. We'd better go to some hotel close by for to-night. No good setting out to look for rooms in this."

In the kitchen at Lille there had been a picture called "The Impenitent Sinner," in which demons were seen dragging a dead man from his bed into flames and darkness; Sylvia pointed out its likeness to the present scene at Charing Cross. Outside the station it was even worse. There was a thunderous din; horses came suddenly out of the darkness; everybody seemed to be shouting; boys were running along with torches; it was impossible to breathe.

"Why did they build a city here?" she inquired.

At last they came to a house in a quieter street, where they walked up high, narrow stairs to their bedrooms.

The next morning her father took Sylvia's measurements and told her not to get up before he came back. When she walked out beside him in a Norfolk suit nobody seemed to stare at her; when her hair had been properly cut by a barber and she could look at herself in a long glass, she plunged her hands into her trousers pockets and felt securely a boy.

While they were walking to a mysterious place called the Underground, her father asked if she had caught bronchitis, and he would scarcely accept her word that she was trying to practise whistling.

"Well, don't do it when I'm inquiring about rooms or the people in the house may think it's something infectious," he advised. "And don't forget your name's Sylvester. Which reminds me it wouldn't be a bad notion if I was to change my own name. There's no sense in running one's head into a noose, and if inquiries *were* made by the police it would be foolish to ram my name right down their throats. Henry Snow. What about Henry White? Better keep to the same initials. I've got it. Henry Scarlett. You couldn't find anything more opposite to Snow than that."

Thus Sylvia Snow became Sylvester Scarlett.

After a long search they took rooms with Mrs. Threadgould, a widow who with her two boys, Willie and Ernie, lived at 45 Pomona Terrace, Shepherd's Bush. There were no other lodgers, for the house was small; and Henry Scarlett decided it was just the place in which to stay quietly for a while until the small sum of money he had brought with him from Lille was finished, when it would be necessary to look for work. Meanwhile he announced that he should study very carefully the advertisements in the daily papers, leaving everybody with the impression that reading advertisements was a most erudite business, a kind of scientific training that when the moment arrived would produce practical results.

Sylvia meanwhile was enjoined to amuse herself in the company of Mrs. Threadgould's two boys, who were about her own age. It happened that at this time Willie Threadgould, the elder, was obsessed by secret societies, to which his brother Ernie and many other boys in the neighborhood had recently been initiated. Sylvia was regarded with suspicion by Willie until she was able to thrill him with the story of various criminal associations in France and so became his lieutenant in all enterprises. Most of the secret societies that had been rapidly formed by Willie and as rapidly dissolved had possessed a merely academic value; now with Sylvia's advent they were given a practical intention. Secrecy for secrecy's sake went out of fashion. Muffling the face in dusters, giving the sign and countersign, lurking at the corner of the road to meet another conspirator, were excellent decorations, but Sylvia pointed out that they led nowhere and produced nothing; to illustrate her theory she proposed a secret society for ringing other people's bells. She put this forward as a kind of elementary exercise; but she urged that, when the neighborhood had realized the bell-ringing as something to which they were more continuously exposed than other neighborhoods, the moment would be ripe to form another secret society that should inflict a more serious nuisance. From the secret society that existed to be a nuisance would grow another secret society that existed to be a threat; and finally there seemed no reason why Willie Threadgould (Sylvia was still feminine enough to let Willie think it was Willie) should control Shepherd's Bush and emulate the most remarkable brigands of history. In the end Sylvia's imagination banished her from the ultimate power at which she aimed. The Secret Society for Ringing Other

People's Bells did its work so well that extra policemen were put on duty to cope with the nuisance and an inspector made a house-to-house visitation, which gave her father such a shock that he left Pomona Terrace the next day and took a room in Lillie Road, Fulham.

"We have been betrayed," Sylvia assured Willie. "Do not forget to avenge my capture."

Willie vowed he would let nothing interfere with his vengeance, not even if the traitor turned out to be his own brother Ernie.

Sylvia asked if he would kill him, and reminded Willie that it was a serious thing to betray a secret society when that society was doing something more than dressing up. Willie doubted if it would be possible to kill the culprit, but swore that he should prefer death to what should happen to him.

Sylvia was so much gratified by Willie's severity that she led him into a corner, where, having exacted his silence with the most solemn oaths, she betrayed herself and the secret of her sex; then they embraced. When they parted forever next day, Sylvia felt that she had left behind her in Willie's heart a romantic memory that would never fade.

Mrs. Meares, who kept the house in Lillie Road, was an Irishwoman whose husband had grown tired of her gentility and left her. She did not herself sum up her past so tersely as this, but Sylvia was sure that Mr. Meares had left her because he could no longer endure the stories about her royal descent. Perhaps he might have been able to endure his wife's royal descent, because, after all, he had married into the family and might have extracted some pride out of that fact; but all her friends apparently came from kings and queens, too. Ireland, if Mrs. Meares was to be believed, consisted of one large poverty-stricken royal family, which must have cheapened the alliance for Mr. Meares. It was lucky that he was still alive, for otherwise Sylvia was sure that her father would have married their new landlady, such admiration did he always express for the manner in which she struggled against misfortune without losing her dignity. This, from what Sylvia could see, consisted of wearing silk skirts that trailed in the dust of her ill-kept house and of her fanning herself in an arm-chair however cold the weather. The only thing that stirred her to action was the necessity of averting an ill-omen. Thus, she would turn back on a flight of stairs rather than pass anybody descending; although ordinarily when she went up-stairs she used to sigh and hold her heart at every step. Sylvia remembered her mother's scrupulous care of her house, even in the poorest days; she could not help contrasting her dignity with this Irish dignity that was content to see indefinite fried eggs on her table, cockroaches in the bedrooms, and her own placket always agape. Mrs. Meares used to say that she would never let any of her rooms to ladies, because ladies always fussed.

"Gentlemen are so much more considerate," said Mrs. Meares.

Their willingness to be imposed upon made Sylvia contemptuous of the sex she had adopted, and she tried to spur her father to protest when his bed was still unmade at four o'clock in the afternoon.

"Why don't you make it?" he suggested. "I don't like to worry poor Mrs. Meares."

Sylvia, however contemptuous of manhood, had no intention of relinquishing its privileges; she firmly declined to have anything to do with the making of beds.

The breakfast-room was placed below the level of the street. Here, in an atmosphere of cat-haunted upholstery and broken springs, of overcooked vegetables and dingy fires, yet withal of a kind of frowsy comfort, Sylvia sometimes met the other lodgers. One of them was Baron von Statten, a queer German, whom Sylvia could not make out at all, for he spoke English as if he had been taught by a maid-of-all-work with a bad cold, powdered his pink face, and wore three rings, yet was so poor that sometimes he stayed in bed for a week at a stretch, pending negotiations with his laundress. The last piece of information Sylvia obtained from Clara, the servant, who professed a great contempt for the baron. Mrs. Meares, on the other hand, derived much pride from his position in her house, which she pointed out was really that of an honored guest, since he owed now nearly seven weeks' rent; she never failed to refer to him by his title with warm affection. Another lodger was a Welsh pianist called Morgan, who played the piano all day long and billiards for as much of the night as he could. He was a bad-tempered young man with long black hair and a great antipathy to the baron, whom he was always trying to insult; indeed, once at breakfast he actually poured a cup of coffee over him.

"Mr. Morgan!" Mrs. Meares had cried. "No Irishman would have done that."

"No Irishman would ever do anything," the pianist snapped, "if he could get somebody else to do it for him."

Sylvia welcomed the assault, because the scalding coffee drove the baron to unbutton his waistcoat in a frenzy of discomfort and thereby confirmed Clara's legend about the scarcity of his linen.

The third lodger was Mr. James Monkley, about whom Sylvia was undecided; sometimes she liked him very much, at other times she disliked him equally. He had curly red hair, finely cut red lips, a clear complexion, and an authoritative, determined manner, but his eyes, instead of being the pleasant blue they ought to have been in such a face, were of a shade of muddy green and never changed their expression. Sylvia once mentioned about Mr. Monkley's eyes to Clara, who said they were like a fish.

"But Monkley's not like a fish," Sylvia argued.

"I don't know what he's like, I'm sure," said Clara. "All I know is he gives any one the creeps something shocking whenever he stares, which he's forever doing. Well, fine feathers don't make a summer and he looks best who looks last, as they say."

One reason for disliking Mr. Monkley was his intimacy with her father. Sylvia would not have objected to this if it had not meant long confabulations during which she was banished from the room and, what was worse, thrown into the society of Mrs. Meares, who always seemed to catch her when she was trying to make her way down-stairs to Clara.

"Come in and talk to me," Mrs. Meares would say. "I'm just tidying up my bedroom. Ah, Sil, if God had not willed otherwise I should have had a boy just your age now. Poor little innocent!"

Sylvia knew too well this counterpart of hers and hated him as much in his baby's grave as she might have done were he still her competitor in life.

"Ah, it's a terrible thing to be left as I've been left, to be married and not married, to have been a mother and to have lost my child. And I was never intended for this life. My father kept horses. We had a carriage. But they say, 'trust an Irishwoman to turn her hand to anything.' And it's true. There's many people would wonder how I do it with

only one maid. How's your dear father? He seems comfortable. Ah, it's a privilege to look after a gentleman like him. He seems to have led a most adventurous life. Most of his time spent abroad, he tells me. Well, travel gives an air to a man. Ah, now if one of the cats hasn't been naughty just when I'd got my room really tidy! Will you tell Clara, if you are going down-stairs, to bring up a dustpan? I don't mind asking you, for at your age I think you would be glad to wait on the ladies like a little gentleman. Sure, as your father said the other day, it's a very good thing you're in a lady's house. That's why the dear baron's so content; and the poor man has much to try him, for his relations in Berlin have treated him abominably."

Such speeches inflicted upon her because Monkley wanted to talk secrets with her father made her disapprove of Monkley. Nevertheless, she admired him in a way; he was the only person in the house who was not limp, except Mr. Morgan, the pianist; but he used to glare at her, when they occasionally met, and seemed to regard her as an unpleasant result of being late for breakfast, like a spot on the table-cloth made by a predecessor's egg.

Monkley used to ask Sylvia sometimes about what she was going to do. Naturally he treated her future as a boy's future, which took most of the interest out of the conversation; for Sylvia did not suppose that she would be able to remain a boy very much longer. The mortifying fact, too, was that she was not getting anything out of her transformation: for all the fun she was having, she might as well have stayed a girl. There had been a brief vista of liberty at Pomona Terrace; here, beyond going out to buy a paper or tobacco for her father, she spent most of her time in gossiping with Clara, which she could probably have done more profitably in petticoats.

Winter drew out to spring; to the confabulations between Jimmy Monkley and Henry Scarlett were now added absences from the house that lasted for a day or two at a time. These expeditions always began with the friends' dressing up in pearl-buttoned overcoats very much cut in at the waist. Sylvia felt that such careful attention to externals augured the great secrecy and importance of the enterprise; remembering the effect of Willie Threadgould's duster-shrouded countenance upon his fellow-conspirators, she postulated to herself that with the human race, particularly the male portion, dress was always the prelude to action. One morning after breakfast, when Monkley and her father had hurried off to catch a train, the baron said in his mincing voice:

"Off ra-c-cing again! They do enjoy themselves-s-s."

She asked what racing meant, and the baron replied:

"Hors-s-se-ra-c-cing, of cour-se."

Sylvia, being determined to arrive at the truth of this business, put the baron through a long interrogation, from which she managed to learn that the jockeys wore colored silk jackets and that in his prosperous days the baron had found the sport too exciting for his heart. After breakfast Sylvia took the subject with her into the kitchen, and tried to obtain fuller information from Clara, who, with the prospect of a long morning's work, was disinclined to be communicative.

"What a boy you are for asking questions! Why don't you ask your dad when he comes home, or that Monkley? As if I'd got time to talk about racing. I've got enough racing of my own to think about; but if it goes on much longer I shall race off out of it one of these days, and that's a fact. You may take a pitcher to the well, but you can't make it drink, as they say."

Sylvia withdrew for a while, but later in the afternoon she approached Clara again.

"God bless the boy! He's got racing on the brain," the maid exclaimed. "I had a young man like that once, but I soon gave him the go-by. He was that stuffed up with halfpenny papers he couldn't cuddle any one without crackling like an egg-shell. 'Don't carry on so, Clara,' he said to me. 'I had a winner to-day in the three-thirty.' 'Did you?' I answered, very cool. 'Well, you've got a loser now,' and with that I walked off very dignified and left him. It's the last straw, they say, that gives the camel the hump. And he properly gave me the hump. But I reckon, I do, that it's mugs like him as keeps your dad and that Monkley so smart-looking. I reckon most of the racing they do is racing to see which can get some silly josser to give them his money first."

Sylvia informed Clara that her father used to play cards for money in France.

"There you are. What did I tell you?" Clara went on. "Nap, they call it, but I reckon that there Monkley keeps wide enough awake. Oh, he's an artful one, he is! Birds and feathers keep together, they say, and I reckon your dad's cleverer than what he makes out to be."

Sylvia produced in support of this idea her father's habit of juggling with a penny.

"What did I tell you?" Clara exclaimed, triumphantly. "Take it from me, Sil, the two of them has a rare old time with this racing. I've got a friend, Maudie Tilt, who's in service, and her brother started off to be a jockey, only he never got very far, because he got kicked on the head by a horse when he was sweeping out the stable, which was very aggravating for his relations, because he had a sister who died in a galloping consumption the same week. I reckon horses was very unlucky for them, I do."

"My grandmother got run over coming back from my grandfather's funeral," Sylvia proclaimed.

"By the hearse?" Clara asked, awestruck.

Sylvia felt it would be well to make the most of her story, and replied without hesitation in the affirmative.

"Well, they say to meet an empty hearse means a pleasant surprise," said Clara. "But I reckon your grandma didn't think so. Here, I'll tell you what, my next afternoon off I'll take you round to see Maudie Tilt. She lives not far from where the Cedars 'bus stops."

About a week after this conversation Clara, wearing balloon sleeves of last year's fashion and with her hair banked up to support a monstrous hat, descended into the basement, whence she and Sylvia emerged into a fine April afternoon and hailed an omnibus.

"Mind you don't get blown off the top, miss," said the conductor, with a glance at Clara's sleeves.

"No fear of that. I've grown a bit heavier since I saw your face," Clara replied, climbing serenely to the top of the omnibus. "Two, as far as you go," she said, handing twopence to the conductor when he came up for the fares.

"I could go a long way with you, miss," he said, punching the tickets with a satisfied twinkle. "What a lovely hat!"

"Is it? Well, don't start in trying to eat it because you've been used to green food all your life."

"Your sister answers very sharp, doesn't she, Tommy?" said the conductor to Sylvia.

After this display of raillery Sylvia felt it would be weak merely to point out that Clara was not a sister, so she remained silent.

The top of the omnibus was empty except for Clara and Sylvia; the conductor, whistling a cheerful tune, descended again.

"Saucy things," Clara commented. "But there, you can't blame them. It makes any one feel cheerful to be out in the open air like this."

Maudie's house in Castleford Road was soon reached after they left the omnibus. When they rang the area bell, Maudie herself opened the door.

"Oh, you did give me a turn!" she exclaimed. "I thought it was early for the milkman. You couldn't have come at a better time, because they've both gone away. She's been ill, and they'll be away for a month. Cook's gone for a holiday, and I'm all alone."

Sylvia was presented formally to the hostess; and when, at Clara's prompting, she had told the story of her grandmother's death, conversation became easy. Maudie Tilt took them all over the house, and, though Clara said she should die of nervousness, insisted upon their having tea in the drawing-room.

"Supposing they come back," Clara whispered. "Oh, lor'! Whatever's that?"

Maudie told her not to be silly, and went on to boast that she did not care if they did come back, because she had made up her mind to give up domestic service and go on the stage.

"Fancy!" said Clara. "Whoever put that idea into your head?"

"Well, I started learning some of the songs they sing in the halls, and some friends of mine gave a party last January and I made quite a hit. I'll sing you a song now, if you like."

And Maudie, sitting down at the piano, accompanied herself with much effect in one of Miss Vesta Victoria's songs.

"For goodness' sake keep quiet, Maudie," Clara begged. "You'll have the neighbors coming 'round to see whatever's the matter. You have got a cheek."

Sylvia thoroughly enjoyed Maudie's performance and thought she would have a great success. She liked Maudie's smallness and neatness and glittering, dark eyes. Altogether it was a delightful afternoon, and she was sorry to go away.

"Come again," cried Maudie, "before they come back, and we'll have some more."

"Oh, I did feel frightened!" Clara said, when she and Sylvia were hurrying to catch the omnibus back to Lillie Road. "I couldn't enjoy it, not a bit. I felt as if I was in the bath and the door not bolted, though they do say stolen fruit is the sweetest."

When she got home, Sylvia found that her father had returned also, and she held forth on the joys of Maudie Tilt's house.

"Wants to go on the stage, does she?" said Monkley, who was in the room. "Well, you'd better introduce us and we'll see what we can do. Eh, Harry?"

Sylvia approved of this suggestion and eagerly vouched for Maudie's willingness.

"We'll have a little supper-party," said Monkley. "Sil can go round and tell her we're coming."

Sylvia blessed the persistency with which she had worried Clara on the subject of racing; otherwise, bisexual and solitary, she might have been moping in Lillie Road. She hoped that Maudie Tilt would not offer any objections to the proposed party, and determined to point out most persuasively the benefit of Monkley's patronage, if she really meant to go on the stage. However, Maudie was not at all difficult to convince and showed herself as eager for the party as Sylvia herself. She was greatly impressed by her visitor's experience of the stage, but reckoned that no boys should have pinched her legs or given her the broken masks.

"You ought to have punched into them," she said. "Still, I dare say it wasn't so easy for you, not being a girl. Boys are very nasty to one another, when they'd be as nice as anything to a girl."

Sylvia was conscious of a faint feeling of contempt for Maudie's judgment, and she wondered from what her illusions were derived.

Clara, when she heard of the proposed party, was dubious. She had no confidence in Monkley, and said so frankly.

"No one wants to go chasing after a servant-girl for nothing," she declared. "Every cloud's got a silver lining."

"But what could he want to do wrong?" Sylvia asked.

"Ah, now you're asking. But if I was Maudie Tilt I'd keep myself to myself."

Clara snapped out the last remark and would say nothing more on the subject.

A few days later, under Sylvia's guidance, James Monkley and Henry Scarlett sought Castleford Road. Maudie had put on a black silk dress, and with her hair done in what she called the French fashion she achieved a kind of Japanese piquancy.

"*N'est-ce pas qu'elle a un chic?*" Sylvia whispered to her father.

They had supper in the dining-room and made a good deal of noise over it, for Monkley had brought two bottles of champagne, and Maudie could not resist producing a bottle of cognac from her master's cellar. When Monkley asked if everything were not kept under lock and key, Maudie told him that if they couldn't trust her they could lump it; she could jolly soon find another place; and, any way, she intended to get on the stage somehow. After supper they went up-stairs to the drawing-room; and Maudie was going to sit down at the piano, when Monkley told her that he would accompany her, because he wanted to see how she danced. Maudie gave a most spirited performance, kicking up her legs and stamping until the ornaments on the mantelpiece rattled. Then Monkley showed Maudie where she could make improvements in her renderings, which surprised Sylvia very much, because she had never connected Monkley with anything like this.

"Quite an artist is Jimmy," Henry Scarlett declared. Then he added in an undertone to Sylvia: "He's a wonderful chap, you know. I've taken a rare fancy to him. Do anything. Sharp as a needle. I may as well say right out that he's made all the difference to my life in London."



Presently Monkley suggested that Maudie should show them over the house, and they went farther up-stairs to the principal bedroom, where the two men soused their heads with the various hair-washes left behind by the master of the house. Henry expressed a desire to have a bath, and retired with an enormous sponge and a box of bath-salts. Monkley began to flirt with Maudie; Sylvia, feeling that the evening was becoming rather dull, went down-stairs again to the drawing-room and tried to pass the time away with a stereoscope.

After that evening Monkley and Scarlett went often to see Maudie, but, much to Sylvia's resentment, they never took her with them. When she grumbled about this to Clara, Clara told her that she was well out of it.

"Too many cooks drink up the soup, which means you're one too many, my lad, and a rolling stone doesn't let the grass grow under its feet, which means as that Monkley's got some game on."

Sylvia did not agree with Clara's point of view; she still felt aggrieved by being left out of everything. Luckily, when life in Lillie Road was becoming utterly dull again, a baboon escaped from Earl's Court Exhibition, climbed up the drain-pipe outside the house, and walked into Mrs. Meares's bedroom; so that for some time after this she had palpitations whenever a bell rang. Mr. Morgan was very unkind about her adventure, for he declared that the baboon looked so much like an Irishman that she must have thought it was her husband come back; Mr. Morgan had been practising the Waldstein Sonata at the time, and had been irritated by the interruption of a wandering ape.

A fortnight after this there was a scene in the house that touched Sylvia more sharply, for Maudie Tilt arrived one morning and begged to speak with Mr. Monkley, who, being in the Scarletts' room at the moment, looked suddenly at Sylvia's father with a question in his eyes.

"I told you not to take them all," Henry said.

"I'll soon calm her down," Monkley promised. "If you hadn't insisted on taking those bottles of hair-wash she'd never have thought of looking to see if the other things were still there."

Henry indicated his daughter with a gesture.

"Rot! The kid's got to stand in on this," Monkley said, with a laugh. "After all, it was he who introduced us. I'll bring her up here to talk it out," he added.

Presently he returned with Maudie, who had very red eyes and a frightened expression.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she burst out. "Whatever did you want to take that jewelry for? I only found out last night, and they'll be home to-morrow. Whatever am I going to say?"

"Jewelry?" repeated Monkley, in a puzzled voice. "Harry took some hair-wash, if that's what you mean."

"Jewelry?" Henry murmured, taking the cue from his friend. "Was there any jewelry?"

"Oh, don't pretend you don't know nothing about it," Maudie cried, dissolving into tears. "For the love of God give it to me, so as I can put it back. If you're hard up, Jimmy, you can take what I saved for the stage; but give us back that jewelry."

"If you act like that you'll make your fortune as a professional," Monkley sneered.

Maudie turned to Sylvia in desperation. "Sil," she cried, "make them give it back. It'll be the ruin of me. Why, it's burglary! Oh, whatever shall I do?"

Maudie flung herself down on the bed and wept convulsively. Sylvia felt her heart beating fast, but she strung herself up to the encounter and faced Monkley.

"What's the good of saying you haven't got the jewelry," she cried, "when you know you have? Give it to her or I'll—I'll go out into the middle of the road and shout at the top of my voice that there's a snake in the house, and people will have to come in and look for it, because when they didn't believe about the baboon in Mrs. Meares's room the baboon was there all the time."

She stopped and challenged Monkley with flashing eyes, head thrown back, and agitated breast.

"You oughtn't to talk to a grown-up person like that, you know," said her father.

Something unspeakably soft in his attitude infuriated Sylvia, and spinning round she flashed out at him:

"If you don't make Monkley give back the things you stole I'll tell everybody about *you*. I mean it. I'll tell everybody." She stamped her feet.

"That's a daughter," said Henry. "That's the way they're bringing them up nowadays—to turn round on their fathers."

"A daughter?" Monkley echoed, with an odd look at his friend.

"I mean son," said Henry, weakly. "Anyway, it's all the same."

Monkley seemed to pay no more attention to the slip, but went over to Maudie and began to coax her.

"Come on, Maudie, don't turn away from a good pal. What if we did take a few things? They shouldn't have left them behind. People deserve to lose things if they're so careless."

"That's quite true," Henry agreed, virtuously. "It'll be a lesson to them."

"Go back and pack up your things, my dear, and get out of the house. I'll see you through. You shall take another name and go on the stage right away. What's the good of crying over a few rings and bangles?"

But Maudie refused to be comforted. "Give them back to me. Give them back to me," she moaned.

"Oh, all right," Monkley said, suddenly. "But you're no sport, Maudie. You've got the chance of your life and you're turning it down. Well, don't blame me if you find yourself still a slavey five years hence."

Monkley went down-stairs and came back again in a minute or two with a parcel wrapped up in tissue-paper.

"You haven't kept anything back?" Maudie asked, anxiously.

"My dear girl, you ought to know how many there were. Count them."

"Would you like me to give you back the hair-wash?" Henry asked, indignantly.

Maudie rose to go away.

"You're not angry with me, Jim?" she asked, pleadingly.

"Oh, get out!" he snapped.

Maudie turned pale and rushed from the room.

"Silly b——h," Monkley said. "Well, it's been a very instructive morning," he added, fixing Sylvia with his green

eyes and making her feel uncomfortable.

"Some people make a fuss about the least little thing," Henry said. "There was just the same trouble when I pawned my wife's jewelry. Coming round the corner to have one?" he inquired, looking at Monkley, who said he would join him presently and followed him out of the room.

When she was alone, Sylvia tried to put her emotions in order, without success. She had wished for excitement, but, now that it had arrived, she wished it had kept away from her. She was not so much shocked by the revelation of what her father and Monkley had done (though she resented their cowardly treatment of Maudie), as frightened by what might ultimately happen to her in their company. They might at any moment find themselves in prison, and if she were to be let out before the others, what would she do? She would be utterly alone and would starve; or, what seemed more likely, they would be arrested and she would remain in Lillie Road, waiting for news and perhaps compelled to earn her living by working for Mrs. Meares. At all costs she must be kept informed of what was going on. If her father tried to shut her out of his confidence, she would appeal to Monkley. Her meditation was interrupted by Monkley himself.

"So you're a little girl," he said, suddenly. "Fancy that."

"What if I am?" challenged Sylvia, who saw no hope of successfully denying the accusation.

"Oh, I don't know," Monkley murmured. "It's more fun, that's all. But, look here, girl or boy, don't let me ever have any more heroics from you. D'ye hear? Or, by God! I'll—"

Sylvia felt that the only way of dealing with Monkley was to stand up to him from the first.

"Oh, shut up!" she broke in. "You can't frighten me. Next time, perhaps you'll tell me beforehand what you're going to do, and then I'll see if I'll let you do it."

He began to laugh. "You've got some pluck."

"Why?"

"Why, to cheek me like that."

"I'm not Maudie, you see," Sylvia pointed out.

Presently a spasm of self-consciousness made her long to be once more in petticoats, and, grabbing wildly at her flying boyhood, she said how much she wanted to have adventures. Monkley promised she should have as many as she liked, and bade her farewell, saying that he was going to join her father in a saloon bar round the corner. Sylvia volunteered to accompany him, and after a momentary hesitation he agreed to take her. On the stairs they overtook the baron, very much dressed up, who, in answer to an inquiry from Monkley, informed them that he was going to lunch with the Emperor of Byzantium.

"Give my love to the Empress," Monkley laughed.

"It's-s nothing to laugh at," the baron said, severely. "He lives in West Kensington."

"Next door to the Pope, I suppose," Monkley went on.

"You never will be serious, but I'll take you there one afternoon, if you don't believe me."

The baron continued on his way down-stairs with a kind of mincing dignity, and Mrs. Meares came out of her bedroom.

"Isn't it nice for the dear baron?" she purred. "He's received some of his money from Berlin, and at last he can go and look up his old friends. He's lunching with the Emperor to-day."

"I hope he won't drop his crown in the soup," Monkley said.

"Ah, give over laughing, Mr. Monkley, for I like to think of the poor baron in the society to which he belongs. And he doesn't forget his old friends. But there, after all, why would he, for, though I'm living in Lillie Road, I've got the real spirit of the past in my blood, and the idea of meeting the Emperor doesn't elate me at all. It seems somehow as if I were used to meeting emperors."

On the way to the public house Monkley held forth to Sylvia on the prevalence of human folly, and vowed that he would hold the baron to his promise and visit the Emperor himself.

"And take me with you?" Sylvia asked.

"You seem very keen on the new partnership," he observed.

"I don't want to be left out of things," she explained. "Not out of anything. It makes me look stupid. Father treats me like a little girl; but it's he who's stupid, really."

They had reached the public house, and Henry was taken aback by Sylvia's arrival. She, for her part, was rather disappointed in the saloon bar. The words had conjured something much more sumptuous than this place that reminded her of a chemist's shop.

"I don't want the boy to start learning to drink," Henry protested.

Monkley told him to give up the fiction of Sylvia's boyhood with him, to which Henry replied that, though, as far as he knew, he had only been sitting here ten minutes, Jimmy and Sylvia seemed to have settled the whole world between them in that time.

"What's more, if she's going to remain a boy any longer, she's got to have some new clothes," Monkley announced.

Sylvia flushed with pleasure, recognizing that cooperative action of which preliminary dressing-up was the pledge.

"You see, I've promised to take her round with me to the Emperor of Byzantium."

"I don't know that pub," said Henry. "Is it Walham Green way?"

Monkley told him about meeting the baron, and put forward his theory that people who were willing to be duped by the Emperor of Byzantium would be equally willing to be duped by other people, with much profit to the other people.

"Meaning you and me?" said Henry.

"Well, in this case I propose to leave you out of the first act," Monkley said. "I'm going to have a look at the scene myself. There's no one like you with the cards, Harry, but when it comes to the patter I think you'll give me first."

Presently, Sylvia was wearing Etons, at Monkley's suggestion, and waiting in a dream of anticipation; the baron proclaimed that the Emperor would hold a reception on the first Thursday in June. When Monkley said he wanted young Sylvester to go with them, the baron looked doubtful; but Monkley remarked that he had seen the baron coming out of a certain house in Earl's Court Road the other day, which seemed to agitate him and make him anxious for Sylvia to attend the reception.

Outside the very commonplace house in Stanmore Crescent, where the Emperor of Byzantium lived, Monkley told the baron that he did not wish anything said about Sylvester's father. Did the baron understand? He wished a certain mystery to surround Sylvester. The baron after his adventure in Earl's Court Road would appreciate the importance of secrecy.

"You are a regular devil, Monkley," said von Statten, in his most mincing voice. Remembering the saloon bar, Sylvia had made up her mind not to be disappointed if the Emperor's reception failed to be very exciting; yet on the whole she was rather impressed. To be sure, the entrance hall of 14 Stanmore Crescent was not very imperial; but a footman took their silk hats, and, though Monkley whispered that he was carrying them like flower-pots and was evidently the jobbing gardener from round the corner, Sylvia was agreeably awed, especially when they were invited to proceed to the antechamber.

"In other words, the dining-room," said Monkley to the baron.

"Hush! Don't you see the throne-room beyond?" the baron whispered.

Sure enough, opening out of the antechamber was a smaller room in which was a dais covered with purple cloth. On a high Venetian chair sat the Emperor, a young man with dark, bristling hair, in evening dress. Sylvia stood on tiptoe to get a better look at him; but there was such a crush in the entrance to the throne-room that she had to be content for the present with staring at the numerous courtiers and listening to Monkley's whispered jokes, which the baron tried in vain to stop.

"I suppose where the young man with a head like a door-mat and a face like a scraper is sitting is where the Imperial family congregates after dinner. I'd like to see what's under that purple cloth. Packing-cases, I'll bet a quid."

"Hush! hush! not so loud," the baron implored. "Here's Captain Grayrigg, the Emperor's father."

He pointed to a very small man with pouched eyes and a close-cropped pointed beard.

"Do you mean to tell me the Emperor hasn't made his father a field-marshal? He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"My dear man, Captain Grayrigg married the late Empress. He is nothing himself."

"I suppose he has to knock the packing-cases together and pay for the ices."

But the baron had pressed forward to meet Captain Grayrigg and did not answer. Presently he came back very officiously and beckoned to Monkley, whom he introduced.

"From New York City, Colonel," said Monkley, with a quick glance at the baron.

Sylvia nearly laughed, because Jimmy was talking through his nose in the most extraordinary way.

"Ah! an American," said Captain Grayrigg. "Then I expect this sort of thing strikes you as quite ridiculous."

"Why, no, Colonel. Between ourselves I may as well tell you I'm over here myself on a job not unconnected with royalty."

Monkley indicated Sylvia with a significant look.

"This little French boy who is called Master Sylvestre at present may be heard of later."

Jimmy had accentuated her nationality. Sylvia, quick enough to see what he wanted her to do, replied in French.

A tall young man with an olive complexion and priestly gestures, standing close by, pricked up his ears at Monkley's remark. When Captain Grayrigg had retired he came forward and introduced himself as the Prince de Condé.

Monkley seemed to be sizing up the prince; then abruptly with an air of great cordiality he took his arm.

"Say, Prince, let's go and find an ice. I guess you're the man I've been looking for ever since I landed in England."

They moved off together to find refreshment. Sylvia was left in the antechamber, which was filled with a most extraordinary crowd of people. There were young men with very pink cheeks who all wore white roses or white carnations in their buttonholes; there was a battered-looking woman with a wreath of laurel in her hair who suddenly began to declaim in a wailful voice. Everybody said, "Hush," and tried to avoid catching his neighbor's eye. At first, Sylvia decided that the lady must be a lunatic whom people had to humor, because her remarks had nothing to do with the reception and were not even intelligible; then she decided that she was a ventriloquist who was imitating a cat. An old gentleman in kilts was standing near her, and Sylvia remembered that once in France she had seen somebody dressed like that, who had danced in a tent; this lent color to the theory of their both being entertainers. The old gentleman asked the baron if he had the Gaelic, and the baron said he had not; whereupon the old gentleman sniffed very loudly, which made Sylvia feel rather uncomfortable, because, though she had not eaten garlic, she had eaten onions for lunch. Presently the old gentleman moved away and she asked the baron when he was going to begin his dance; the baron told her that he was the chief of a great Scottish clan and that he always dressed like that. A clergyman with two black-and-white dogs under his arms was walking about and protesting in a high voice that he couldn't shake hands; and a lady in a Grecian tunic, standing near Sylvia, tried to explain to her in French that the dogs were descended from King Charles I. Sylvia wanted to tell her she spoke English, because she was sure something had gone wrong with the explanation, owing to the lady's French; but she did not like to do so after Jimmy's deliberate insistence upon her nationality.

Presently a very fussy woman with a long, stringy neck, bulging eyes, and arched fingers came into the antechamber and wanted to know who had not yet been presented to the Emperor. Sylvia looked round for Jimmy, but he was nowhere to be seen, and, being determined not to go away without entering the throne-room, she said loudly:

*"Moi, je n'ai pas encore vu l'empereur."*

"Oh, the little darling!" trilled the fussy woman. *"Venez avec moi, je vous présenterai moi-même."*

"How beautifully Miss Widgeott speaks French!" somebody murmured, when Sylvia was being led into the throne-room. "It's such a gift."

Sylvia was very much impressed by a large orange flag nailed to the wall above the Emperor's throne.

"*Le drapeau impériale de Byzance,*" Miss Widgeott said. "*Voyez-vous l'aigle avec deux têtes. Il était fait pour sa majesté impériale par le Société du roi Charles I de West London.*"

"King Charles again," Sylvia thought.

"*Il faut baiser la main,*" Miss Widgeott prompted. Sylvia followed out the suggestion; and the Emperor, to whom Miss Widgeott had whispered a few words, said:

"*Ah, vous êtes français,*" and to Miss Widgeott, "Who did you say he was?"

"I really don't know. He came with Baron von Statten. *Comment vous appelez-vous?*" Miss Widgeott asked, turning to Sylvia.

Sylvia answered that she was called Monsieur Sylvestre, and just then a most unusual squealing was heard in the antechamber.

"*Mon dieu! qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?*" Sylvia cried.

"*C'est le—comment dit-on bagpipes en Français? C'est le 'baagpeep' vous savez,*" which left Sylvia as wise as she was before. However, as there was no general panic, she ceased to be frightened. Soon she saw Jimmy beckoning to her from the antechamber, and shortly afterward they left the reception, which had interested Sylvia very much, though she regretted that nobody had offered her an ice.

Monkley congratulated Sylvia upon her quickness in grasping that he had wanted her to pretend she was French, and by his praise roused in her the sense of ambition, which, though at present it was nothing more than a desire to please him personally, marked, nevertheless, a step forward in the development of her character; certainly from this moment the old fear of having no one to look after her began to diminish, and though she still viewed with pleasure the prospect of being alone, she began to have a faint conception of making herself indispensable, perceiving dimly the independence that would naturally follow. Meanwhile, however gratifying Monkley's compliment, it could not compensate her for the ice she had not been given, and Sylvia made this so plain to him that he invited her into a confectioner's shop on the way home and gave her a larger ice than any she had seen at the Emperor's.

Ever since Sylvia had made friends with Jimmy Monkley, her father had adopted the attitude of being left out in the cold, which made him the worst kind of audience for an enthusiastic account of the reception. Mrs. Meares, though obviously condescending, was a more satisfactory listener, and she was able to explain to Sylvia some of the things that had puzzled her, among others the old gentleman's remark about Gaelic.

"This keeping up of old customs and ceremonies in our degenerate days is most commendable," said Mrs. Meares. "I wish I could be doing more in that line here, but Lillie Road does not lend itself to the antique and picturesque; Mr. Morgan, too, gets so impatient even if Clara only hums at her work that I don't like to ask that Scotchman to come and play his bagpipes here, though I dare say he should be only too glad to do so for a shilling. No, my dear boy, I don't mean the gentleman you met at the Emperor's. There is a poor man who plays in the street round here from time to time and dances a sword dance. But the English have no idea of beauty or freedom. I remember last time I saw him the poor man was being moved on for obstructing the traffic."

Clara put forward a theory that the reception had been a church treat. There had been a similar affair in her own parish once, in which the leading scholars of the Sunday-school classes had portrayed the kings and queens of England. She herself had been one of the little princes who were smothered in the Tower, and had worn a pair of her mother's stockings. There had been trouble, she remembered, because the other little prince had been laced up so tightly that he was sick over the pillow that was wanted to stuff out the boy who was representing Henry VIII and could not be used at the last moment.

Sylvia assured her that nothing like this had taken place at the Emperor's, but Clara remained unconvinced.

A week or two passed. The reception was almost forgotten, when one day Sylvia found the dark-complexioned young man with whom Monkley had made friends talking earnestly to him and her father.

"You understand," he was saying. "I wouldn't do this if I didn't require money for my work. You must not look upon me as a pretender. I really am the only surviving descendant in the direct line of the famous Prince de Condé."

"Of course," Monkley answered. "I know you're genuine enough. All you've got to do is to back—Well, here he is," he added, turning round and pointing to Sylvia.

"I don't think Sil looks much like a king," Henry said, pensively. "Though I'm bound to say the only one I ever saw in real life was Leopold of Belgium."

Sylvia began to think that Clara had been right, after all.

"What about the present King of Spain, then?" Monkley asked. "He isn't much more than nine years old, if he's as much. You don't suppose he looks like a king, do you? On the Spanish stamps he looks more like an advertisement for Mellin's food than anything else."

"Naturally the *de jure* King of Spain, who until the present has been considered to be Don Carlos, is also the *de jure* King of France," said the Prince de Condé.

"Don't you start any of your games with kings of France," Henry advised. "I know the French well and they won't stand it. What does he want to be king of two places for? I should have thought Spain was enough for anybody."

"The divine right of monarchs is something greater than mere geography," the Prince answered, scornfully.

"All right. Have it your own way. You're the authority here on kings. But don't overdo it. That's all I advise," Henry said, finally. "I know everybody thinks I'm wrong nowadays," he added, with a glance at Monkley and Sylvia. "But what about Condé's Fluid?"

"What about it?" Monkley asked. "What do you want Condé's for?"

"I don't want it," said Henry. "I simply passed the remark. Our friend here is the Prince de Condé. Well, I merely remark 'What about Condé's Fluid?' I don't want to start an argument, because, as I said, I'm always wrong nowadays, but I think if he wanted to be a prince he ought to have chosen a more *recherché* title, not gone routing

about among patent medicines.”

The Prince de Condé looked inquiringly at Monkley.

“Don’t you bother about him, old chap. He’s gone off at the deep end.”

“I knew it,” Henry said. “I knew I should be wrong. That’s right, laugh away,” he added, bitterly, to Sylvia.

There followed a long explanation by the prince of Sylvia’s royal descent, which she could not understand at all. Monkley, however, seemed to be understanding it very well, so well that her father gave up being offended and loudly expressed his admiration for Jimmy’s grip of the subject.

“Now,” said Monkley, “the question is who are we going to touch?”

The prince asked if he had noticed at the reception a young man, a rather good-looking, fair young man with a white rose in his buttonhole. Monkley said that most of the young men he had seen in Stanmore Crescent would answer to that description, and the prince gave up trying to describe him except as the only son of a wealthy and distinguished painter—Sir Francis Hurndale. It seemed that young Godfrey Hurndale could always command the paternal purse; and the prince suggested that a letter should be sent to his father from the secretary of the *de jure* King of Spain and France, offering him the post of court painter on his accession. Monkley objected that a man who had made money out of painting would not be taken in by so transparent a fraud as that; and the prince explained that Sir Francis would only be amused, but that he would certainly pass the letter on to his son, who was an enthusiastic Legitimist; that the son would consult him, the Prince de Condé; and that afterward it lay with Monkley to make the most of the situation, bearing in mind that he, the prince, required a fair share of the profits in order to advance his great propaganda for a universal Platonic system of government.

“At present,” the prince proclaimed, becoming more and more sacerdotal as he spoke of his scheme—“at present I am a lay member of the Society of Jesus, which represents the Platonic tendency in modern thought. I am vowed to exterminate republicanism, anarchy, socialism, and to maintain the conservative instincts of humanity against—”

“Well, nobody’s going to quarrel with you about spending your own money,” Monkley interrupted.

“He can give it to the Salvation Army if he likes,” Henry agreed.

The discussion of the more practical aspects of the plan went on for several days. Ultimately it was decided to leave Lillie Road as a first step and take a small house in a suburb; to Sylvia’s great delight, for she was tired of the mustiness of Lillie Road, they moved to Rosemary Avenue, Streatham. It was a newly built house and it was all their own, with the Common at one end of the road, and, better still, a back garden. Sylvia had never lived where she had been able to walk out of her own door to her own patch of green; moreover she thoroughly enjoyed the game of being an exiled king that might be kidnapped by his foes at any moment. To be sure, there were disadvantages; for instance, she was not allowed to cultivate an acquaintanceship with the two freckled girls next door on their right, nor with the boy who had an air-gun on their left; but generally the game was amusing, especially when her father became the faithful old French servant, who had guarded her all these years, until Mr. James Monkley, the enthusiastic American amateur of genealogy, had discovered the little king hidden away in the old servant’s cottage. Henry objected to being ordered about by his own daughter, but his objections were overruled by Jimmy, and Sylvia gave him no rest.

“That damned Condé says he’s a lay Jesuit,” Henry grumbled. “But what am I? A lay figure. I suppose you wouldn’t like me to sleep in a kennel in the back yard?” he asked. “Another thing I can’t understand is why on earth you had to be an American, Jimmy.”

Monkley told Henry of his sudden impulse to be an American at the Emperor’s reception.

“Never give way to impulse,” Henry said. “You’re not a bit like an American. You’ll get a nasty growth in your nose or strain it or something. Americans may talk through the nose a bit; but you make a noise like a cat that’s had its tail shut in a door. It’s like living in a Punch and Judy show. It may not damage your nose, but it’s very bad for my ears, old man. It’s all very fine for me to be a French servant. I can speak French; though I don’t look like the servant part of it. But you can’t speak American, and if you go on trying much harder you very soon won’t be able to speak any language at all. I noticed to-day, when you started talking to the furniture fellow, he looked very uneasy. I think he thought he was sitting on a concertina.”

“Anyway, he cleared off without getting this month’s instalment,” Monkley said.

“Oh, it’s a very good voice to have when there are duns kicking around,” Henry said. “Or in a crowded railway carriage. But as a voice to live with, it’s rotten. However, don’t listen to me. My advice doesn’t count nowadays. Only,” and Henry paused impressively, “when people advise you to try linseed oil for your boots as soon as you start talking to them, then don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Notwithstanding Henry’s pessimism, Monkley continued to practise his American; day by day the task of imposing Sylvia on the world as the King of Spain and France was being carefully prepared, too carefully, it seemed to Sylvia, for so much talk beforehand was becoming tiresome. The long delay was chiefly due to Henry’s inability to keep in his head the numerous genealogical facts that were crammed down his throat by the Prince de Condé.

“I never was any good at history even when I was a boy,” Henry protested. “Never. And I was never good at working out cousins and aunts. I know I had two aunts, and hated them both.”

At last Henry’s facts were considered firmly enough implanted to justify a move; and in September the prince and Monkley sat down to compose their preliminary letter to Sir Francis Hurndale. Sylvia by now was so much accustomed to the behavior of her companions that she never thought seriously about the fantastic side of the affair. Her own masquerade as a boy had been passed off so successfully even upon such an acute observer as Jimmy, until her father had let out the secret by a slip of the tongue, that she had no qualms about being accepted as a king. She realized that money was to be made out of it; but the absence of money had already come to seem a temporary discomfort, to relieve which people in a position like her own and her father’s had no reason to be scrupulous. Not that she really ever bothered her head with the morality of financial ways and means. When she spent the ten-franc piece that she thought she had found, the wrong had lain in unwittingly depriving her mother whom she loved; if she had not loved her mother she might have still had scruples about stealing from her; but stealing from people who had plenty of money and with whom there was no binding link of affection would have been quite incomprehensible to her. Therefore the sight of Jimmy Monkley and her father and the Prince de Condé sitting round a spindle-legged tea-table in this new house that smelled pleasantly of varnish was merely something in a day’s work of the life they

were leading, like a game of cards. It was a much jollier life than any she had yet known; her alliance with Jimmy had been a very good move; her father was treated as he ought to be treated by being kept under; she was shortly going to have some more clothes.

Sylvia sat watching the trio, thinking how much more vividly present Jimmy seemed to be than either of the other two—the prince with his greenish complexion never really well shaved, and his turn-down collars that made his black suit more melancholy, or her father with his light, plaintive eyes and big ears. She was glad that she was not going to resemble her father except perhaps in being short and in the shape of her wide nose; yet she was not really very short; it was only that her mother had been so tall; perhaps, too, when her hair grew long again her nose would not seem so wide.

The letter was finished and Jimmy was reading it aloud:

SIR,—I have the honor to ask if, in the probable event of a great dynastic change taking place in one of the chief countries of Europe, you would welcome the post of court painter, naturally at a suitable remuneration. If you read the daily papers, as no doubt you do, you will certainly have come to the conclusion that neither the present ruling house nor what is known as the Carlist party had any real hold upon the affections of the Spanish people. Verb. sap. Interesting changes may be foreshadowed, of which I am not yet at liberty to write more fully. Should you entertain the proposal I shall be happy to wait upon you with further particulars.

I have the honor to be, sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
JOSEPHE-ERNESTE,  
PRINCE DE CONDÉ.

“Do you know what it sounds like?” said Henry. “Mind I’m not saying this because I didn’t write the letter myself. It sounds to me like a cross between a prophecy in Old Moore’s Almanack and somebody trying to sell a patent knife-cleaner.”

“There’s a good deal in what you say,” Monkley agreed, in rather a dissatisfied tone.

Henry was so much flattered by the reception of his criticism that he became compassionate to the faults of the letter and tried hard to point out some of its merits.

“After all,” said Jimmy, “the great thing is that the prince has signed it. If his name doesn’t draw Master Godfrey, no letters are going to. We’ll send it off as it is.”

So the letter was sent. Two days afterward the prince arrived with the news that Godfrey Hurndale had called upon him and that he had been inexpressibly happy at the prospect of meeting the *de jure* King of France and Spain.

“Bring him round to-morrow afternoon about tea-time,” said Monkley. “You haven’t forgotten the family history, Henry?”

Henry said that he had not forgotten a single relation, and that he damned them severally each morning in all their titles while he was dressing.

The next afternoon Sylvia sat in an arm-chair in the presence-room, which Henry supposed was so called because none of the furniture had been paid for, and waited for Godfrey Hurndale’s coming. Her father put on the rusty black evening-dress of the family retainer, and Jimmy wore a most conspicuous check suit and talked so loudly and nasally that Henry was driven to a final protest:

“Look here, Jimmy, I’ve dressed up to help this show in a suit that’s as old as one of those infernal ancestors of Sil’s, but if you don’t get less American it’ll fall to pieces. Every time you guess I can hear a seam give.”

“Remember to talk nothing but French,” Monkley warned Sylvia, when the bell rang. “Go on, Harry. You’ve got to open the door. And don’t forget that *you* can only speak French.”

Monkley followed him out of the room, and his voice could be heard clanking about the hall as he invited young Hurndale into the dining-room first. Henry came back and took up his position behind Sylvia’s chair; she felt very solemn and excited, and asked her father rather irritably why he was muttering. The reason, however, remained a mystery, for the dining-room door opened again and, heralded by Monkley’s twanging invitation, Mr. Hurndale stood shyly in the entrance to the presence-room.

“Go right in, Mr. Hurndale,” Monkley said. “I guess his Majesty’s just about ready to meet you.”

Sylvia, when she saw the young man bowing before her, really felt a kind of royal exaltation and held out her hand to be kissed.

Hurndale reverently bent over it and touched it with his lips; so did the prince, an action for which Sylvia was unprepared and which she rather resented, thinking to herself that he really did not shave and that it had not only been his grubby appearance. Then Hurndale offered her a large bunch of white carnations and she became kingly again.

“*François,*” she commanded her father, “*mets ces œillets dans ma chambre.*”

And when her father passed out with a bow Sylvia was indeed a king. The audience did not last long. There were practical matters to discuss, for which his Majesty was begged to excuse their withdrawal. Sylvia would have liked a longer ceremony. When the visitor had gone they all sat down to a big tea in the presence-room, and she was told that the young man had been so completely conquered by her gracious reception of him that he had promised to raise five hundred pounds for her cause. His reward in addition to royal favors was to be a high class of the Order of Isabella the Catholic. Everybody, even Henry, was in high good humor. The prince did not come to Streatham again; but a week later Monkley got a letter from him with the Paris postmark.

DEAR MR. MONKLEY,—Our young friend handed me a check for £200 the day before yesterday. As he seemed uncertain about the remainder of the sum promised, I took the liberty of drawing my share at once. My great work requires immediate assistance, and I am now busily occupied in Paris. My next address will be a castle in Spain, where perhaps we shall meet when you are looking for your next site.

Most truly yours,  
JOSEPHE-ERNESTE,

Jimmy and Henry stared at each other.

"I knew it," said Henry. "I'm always wrong; but I knew it. Still, if I could catch him, it would take more than Condy's Fluid to disinfect that pea-green welsher after I'd done with him."

Monkley sat biting his lips in silence; and Sylvia, recognizing the expression in his eyes that she dreaded formerly, notwithstanding that he was now her best friend, felt sharply her old repugnance for him. Henry was still abusing the defaulter when Monkley cut him short.

"Shut up. I rather admire him."

"Admire him?" Henry gasped. "I suppose you'd admire the hangman and shake hands with him on the scaffold. It's all very fine for you. You didn't have to learn how Ferdinand the Fifty-eighth married Isabella the Innocent, daughter of Alphonso the Eighth, commonly called Alphonso the Anxious. Condy's Fluid! I swallowed enough of it, I can tell you."

Monkley told him gruffly to keep quiet; then he sat down and began to write, still with that expression in his eyes. Presently he tore up the letter and paced the room.

"Damn that swine," he suddenly shouted, kicking the spindle-legged table into the fireplace. "We wanted the money, you know. We wanted the money badly."

Shortly before dawn the three of them abandoned the new house in Streatham and occupied rooms in the Kennington Park Road. Monkley and Sylvia's father resumed the racing that had temporarily been interrupted by ambition. Sylvia wandered about the streets in a suit of Etons that was rapidly showing signs of wear.

One day early in the new year Sylvia was leaning over the parapet of Waterloo Bridge and munching hot chestnuts. The warmth of them in her pockets was grateful. Her pastime of dropping the shells into the river did not lack interest; she was vaguely conscious in the frosty sunshine of life's bounty, and she offered to the future a welcome from the depths of her being; meanwhile there still remained forty chestnuts to be eaten.

Her meditation was interrupted by a voice from a passerby who had detached himself from the stream of traffic that she had been disregarding in her pensive greed; she looked up and met the glance of a pleasant middle-aged gentleman in a dark-gray coat with collar and cuffs of chinchilla, who was evidently anxious to begin a conversation.

"You're out of school early," he observed.

Sylvia replied that she did not go to school.

"Private tutor?" he asked; and, partly to save further questions about her education, partly because she was not quite sure what a private tutor was, she answered in the affirmative.

The stranger looked along the parapet inquisitively.

"I'm out alone this afternoon," Sylvia said, quickly.

The stranger asked her what amused her most, museums or theaters or listening to bands, and whether she preferred games or country walks. Sylvia would have liked to tell him that she preferred eating chestnuts to anything else on earth at that moment; but, being unwilling to create an impression of trying to snub such a benevolent person, she replied vaguely that she did not know what she liked best. Then because such an answer seemed to imply a lack of intelligence that she did not wish to impute to herself, she informed him that she liked looking at people, which was strictly true, for if she had not been eating chestnuts she would certainly have still been contemplating the traffic across the bridge.

"I'll show you some interesting people, if you care to come with me," the stranger proposed. "Have you anything to do this afternoon?"

Sylvia admitted that her time was unoccupied.

"Come along, then," said the middle-aged gentleman, a little fussily, she thought, and forthwith he hailed a passing hansom. Sylvia had for a long time been ambitious to travel in a hansom. She had already eaten thirty-five chestnuts, only seven of which had been bad; she decided to accept the stranger's invitation. He asked her where she lived and promised to send her home by cab when the entertainment was over.

Sylvia asked if it was a reception to which he was taking her. The middle-aged gentleman laughed, squeezed her hand, and said that it might be called a reception, adding, with a chuckle, "a very warm reception, in fact." Sylvia did not understand the joke, but laughed out of politeness.

There followed an exchange of names, and Sylvia learnt that her new acquaintance was called Corydon.

"You'll excuse me from offering you one of my cards," he said. "I haven't one with me this afternoon."

They drove along for some time, during which the conversation of Mr. Corydon always pursued the subject of her likes and dislikes. They drew clear of the press of traffic and bowled westward toward Sloane Street; Sylvia, recognizing one of the blue West Kensington omnibuses, began to wonder if the cab would take her past Lillie Road where Jimmy had specially forbidden her to go, because both he and her father owed several weeks' rent to Mrs. Meares and he did not want to remind her of their existence. When they drew nearer and nearer to Sylvia's former lodging she began to feel rather uneasy and wish that the cab would turn down a side-street. The landmarks were becoming more and more familiar, and Sylvia was asking herself if Mrs. Meares had employed the stranger to kidnap her as a hostage for the unpaid rent, when the cab turned off into Redcliffe Gardens and soon afterward pulled up at a house.

"Here we are," said Mr. Corydon. "You'll enjoy yourself most tremendously, Sylvester."

The door was opened by a servant, who was apparently dressed as a brigand, which puzzled Sylvia so much that she asked the reason in a whisper. Mr. Corydon laughed.

"He's a Venetian. That's the costume of a gondolier, my dear boy. My friend who is giving the reception dresses all his servants like gondoliers. So much more picturesque than a horrible housemaid."

Sylvia regarded this exotic Clara with considerable interest; the only other Venetian product of which she had hitherto been aware was blinds.

The house, which smelt strongly of incense and watered flowers, awed Sylvia with its luxury, and she began to regret having put foot in a place where it was so difficult to know on what she was intended to tread. However, since

Mr. Corydon seemed to walk everywhere without regard for the softness of the carpets, Sylvia made up her mind to brave the silent criticism of the gondolier and follow up-stairs in his footsteps. Mr. Corydon took her arm and introduced her to a large room where a fume of cigarette smoke and incense blurred the outlines of the numerous guests that sat about in listening groups, while some one played the grand piano. There were many low divans round the room, to one of which Mr. Corydon guided Sylvia, and while the music continued she had an opportunity of studying her fellow-guests. They were mostly young men of about eighteen, rather like the young men at the Emperor's reception; but there were also several middle-aged men of the same type as Mr. Corydon, one of whom came across and shook hands with them both when the music stopped.

"So glad you've come to see me," he said in a voice that sounded as if each word were being delicately fried upon his tongue. "Aren't you going to smoke a cigarette? These are Russian. Aren't they beautiful to look at?"

He proffered a green cigarette-case. Sylvia, who felt that she must take advantage of this opportunity to learn something about a sphere of life which was new to her, asked him what it was made of.

"Jade, my dear. I brought such heaps of beautiful jade back with me from China. I've even got a jade toilet-set. My dear, it was dreadfully expensive."

He giggled. Sylvia, blowing clouds of smoke from her cigarette, thought dreamily what funny things her father would have said about him.

"Raymond's going to dance for us," he said, turning to Corydon. "Isn't it too sweet of him?"

At that moment somebody leaped into the middle of the room with a wild scream and began to throw himself into all sorts of extraordinary attitudes.

"Oh, Raymond, you're too wonderful!" the host ejaculated. "You make me feel quite Bacchic."

Sylvia was not surprised that anybody should feel "backache" (she had thus understood her host) in the presence of such contortions. The screaming Raymond was followed into the arena by another lightly clad and equally shrill youth called Sydney, and both of them flung themselves into a choric frenzy, chasing each other round and round, sawing the air with their legs, and tearing roses from their hair to fling at the guests, who flung them back at the dancers. Suddenly Raymond collapsed upon the carpet and began to moan.

"What's the matter, my dear?" cried the host, rushing forward and kneeling to support the apparently agonized youth in his arms.

"Oh, my foot!" Raymond wailed. "I've trodden on something."

"He's trodden on a thorn. He's trodden on a thorn," everybody said at once.

Raymond was borne tenderly to a divan, and was so much petted that Sydney became jealous and began to dance again, this time on the top of the piano. Presently everybody else began to dance, and Mr. Corydon would have liked to dance with Sylvia; but she declined. Gondoliers entered with trays of liqueurs, and Sylvia, tasting crème de menthe for the first time, found it so good that she drank four glasses, which made her feel rather drowsy. New guests were continually arriving, to whom she did not pay much attention until suddenly she recognized the baron with Godfrey Hurndale, who at the same moment recognized her. The baron rushed forward and seized Sylvia's arm. She thought he was going to drag her back by force to Mrs. Meares to answer for the missing rent, but he began to arch his unoccupied arm like an excited swan, and call out in his high, mincing voice:

"Blackmailers-s-s! blackmailers-s-s!"

"They blackmailed me out of four hundred pounds," said Hurndale.

"Who brought him here?" the baron cried. "It's-s-s true. Godfrey has been persecuted by these horrid people. Blackmailers-s-s!"

All the other guests gathered round Sylvia and behaved like angry women trying to mount an omnibus. Mr. Corydon had turned very pale and was counting his visiting-cards. Sylvia could not understand the reason for all this noise; but vaguely through a green mist of crème de menthe she understood that she was being attacked on all sides and began to get annoyed. Somebody pinched her arm, and without waiting to see who it was she hit the nearest person within reach, who happened to be Mr. Corydon. His visiting-cards fell on the floor, and he groveled on the carpet trying to sweep them together. Sylvia followed her attack on Mr. Corydon by treading hard on Sydney's bare toes, who thereupon slapped her face; presently everybody was pushing her and pinching her and hustling her, until she got in such a rage and kicked so furiously that her enemies retired.

"Who brought him here?" Godfrey Hurndale was demanding. "I tell you he belongs to a gang of blackmailers."

"Most dreadful people," the baron echoed.

"Antonio! Domenico!" the host cried.

Two gondoliers entered the room, and at a word from their master they seized Sylvia and pushed her out into the street, flinging her coat and cap after her. By this time she was in a blind fury, and, snatching the bag of chestnuts from her pocket, she flung it with all her force at the nearest window and knew the divine relief of starring the pane.

An old lady that was passing stopped and held up her hands.

"You wicked young rascal, I shall tell the policeman of you," she gasped, and began to belabor Sylvia with her umbrella.

Such unwarrantable interference was not to be tolerated; Sylvia pushed the old lady so hard that she sat down heavily in the gutter. Nobody else was in sight, and she ran as fast as she could until she found an omnibus, in which she traveled to Waterloo Bridge. There she bought fifty more chestnuts and walked slowly back to Kennington Park Road, vainly trying to find an explanation of the afternoon's adventure.

Her father and Monkley were not back when Sylvia reached home, and she sat by the fire in the twilight, munching her chestnuts and pondering the whole extraordinary business. When the others came in she told her story, and Jimmy looked meaningly at her father.

"Shows how careful you ought to be," he said. Then turning to Sylvia, he asked her what on earth she thought she was doing when she broke the window.

"Suppose you'd been collared by the police, you little fool. We should have got into a nice mess, thanks to you. Look here, in future you're not to speak to people in the street. Do you hear?"



Sylvia had no chestnuts left to throw at Jimmy, so in her rage she took an ornament from the mantelpiece and smashed it on the fender.

"You've got the breaking mania," said Henry. "You'd better spend the next money you've got on cocoanuts instead of chestnuts."

"*Oh, ta gueule!* I'm not going to be a boy any longer."

### CHAPTER III

**W**HILE her hair was growing long again Sylvia developed a taste for reading. She had nothing else to do, for it was not to be supposed that with her head cropped close she could show herself to the world in petticoats. Her refusal any longer to wear male attire gave Monkley and her father an excuse to make one of their hurried moves from Kennington Park Road, where by this time they owed enough money to justify the trouble of evading payment. Henry had for some time expressed a desire to be more central; and a partially furnished top floor was found in Fitzroy Street, or, as the landlord preferred to call it, a self-contained and well-appointed flat. The top floor had certainly been separated from the rest of the house by a wooden partition and a door of its own, which possibly justified the first half of the description, but the good appointments were limited to a bath that looked like an old palette, and a geyser that was not always safe according to Mrs. Bullwinkle, a decrepit charwoman, left behind by the last tenants, together with some under-linen and two jars containing a morbid growth that may formerly have been pickles.

"How d'ye mean, not safe?" Henry asked. "Is it liable to blow up?"

"It went off with a big bang last April and hasn't been lit since," the charwoman said. "But perhaps it 'll be all right now. The worst of it is I never can remember which tap you put the match to."

"You leave it alone, old lady," Henry advised. "Nobody's likely to do much bathing in here; from what I can see of it that bath gives more than it gets. What did the last people use it for—growing watercress or keeping chickens?"

"It was a very nice bath once," the charwoman said.

"Do you mean to say you've ever tried it? Go on! You're mixing it up with the font in which you were baptized. There's never been any water in this bath since the flood."

Nevertheless, however inadequately appointed, the new abode had one great advantage over any other they had known, which was a large raftered garret with windows at either end that ran the whole depth of the house. The windows at the back opened on a limitless expanse of roofs and chimneys, those in front looked across to a dancing-academy on the top floor but one of the house opposite, a view that gave perpetual pleasure to Sylvia during the long period of her seclusion.

Now that Sylvia had become herself again, her father and Monkley insisted upon her doing the housework, which, as Henry reminded her, she was perfectly able to do on account of the excellent training she had received in that respect from her mother. Sylvia perceived the logic of this and made no attempt to contest it; though she stipulated that Mrs. Bullwinkle should not be considered to be helping her.

"We don't want her," Henry protested, indignantly.

"Well, tell her not to come any more," Sylvia said.

"I've shoved her away once or twice," said Henry. "But I expect the people here before us used to give her a saucer of milk sometimes. The best way would be to go out one afternoon and tell her to light the geyser. Then perhaps when we came back she'd be gone for good."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Bullwinkle was of some service to Sylvia, for one day, when she was sadly washing down the main staircase of the house, she looked up from her handiwork and asked Sylvia, who was passing at the moment, if she would like some books to read, inviting her down-stairs to take her choice.

"Mr. Bullwinkle used to be a big reader," the charwoman said. "A very big reader. A very big reader indeed he used to be, did Mr. Bullwinkle. In those days he was caretaker at a Congregational chapel in Gospel Oak, and he used to say that reading took his mind off of religion a bit. Otherwise he'd have gone mad before he did, which was shortly after he left the chapel through an argument he had with Pastor Phillips, who wrote his name in the dust on the reading-desk, which upset my old man, because he thought it wasn't all a straightforward way of telling him that his services wasn't considered satisfactory. Yes," said Mrs. Bullwinkle, with a stertorous sniff, "he died in Bedlam, did my old man. He had a very queer mania; he thought he was inside out, and it preyed on his mind. He wouldn't never have been shut up at all if he hadn't of always been undressing himself in the street and putting on his trousers inside out to suit his complaint. They had to feed him with a chube in the end, because he would have it his mouth couldn't be got at through him being inside out. Queer fancies some people has, don't they? Oh, well, if we was all the same, it would be a dull world I suppose."

Sylvia sat up in the big garret and read through one after another of the late Mr. Bullwinkle's tattered and heterogeneous collection. She did not understand all she read; but there were few books that did not give her on one page a vivid impression, which she used to elaborate with her imagination into something that was really a more substantial experience than the book itself. The days grew longer and more sunny, and Sylvia dreamed them away, reading and thinking and watching from her window the little girls pirouette in the shadowy room opposite. Her hair was quite long now, a warm brown with many glinting strands.

In the summer Jimmy and Henry made a good deal of money by selling a number of tickets for a non-existent stand in one of the best positions on the route of the Diamond Jubilee procession; indeed they felt prosperous enough to buy for themselves and Sylvia seats in a genuine stand. Sylvia enjoyed the pageant, which seemed more like something out of a book than anything in real life. She took advantage of the temporary prosperity to ask for money to buy herself new clothes.

"Can't you see other people dressed up without wanting to go and do the same yourself?" Henry asked. "What's the matter with the frock you've got on?"

However, she talked to Monkley about it and had her own way. When she had new clothes, she used to walk about the streets again, but, though she was often accosted, she would never talk to anybody. Yet it was a dull life,

really, and once she brought up the subject of getting work.

"Work!" her father exclaimed, in horror. "Good heavens! what will you think of next? First it's clothes. Now it's work. Ah, my dear girl, you ought to have had to slave for your living as I had; you wouldn't talk about work."

"Well, can I have a piano and learn to play?" Sylvia asked.

"Perhaps you'd like the band of the Grenadier Guards to come and serenade you in your bedroom while you're dressing?" Henry suggested.

"Why shouldn't she have a piano?" Monkley asked. "I'll teach her to play. Besides, I'd like a piano myself."

So the piano was obtained. Sylvia learned to play, and even to sing a little with her deep voice; and another regular caller for money was added to the already long list.

In the autumn Sylvia's father fell in love, and brought a woman to live in what was henceforth always called the flat, even by Henry, who had hitherto generally referred to it as The Hammam.

In Sylvia's opinion the advent of Mabel Bannerman had a most vitiating effect upon life in Fitzroy Street. Her father began to deteriorate immediately. His return to England and the unsurveyed life he had been leading for nearly two years had produced an expansion of his personality in every direction. He had lost the shiftless insignificance that had been his chief characteristic in France, and though he was still weak and lacking in any kind of initiative, he had acquired a quaintness of outlook and faculty for expressing it which disguised his radical futility under a veil of humor. He was always dominated by Monkley in practical matters where subordination was reasonable and beneficial, but he had been allowed to preserve his own point of view, that with the progress of time had even come to be regarded as important. When Sylvia was much younger she had always criticized her father's behavior; but, like everybody else, she had accepted her mother's leadership of the house and family as natural and inevitable, and had regarded her father as a kind of spoiled elder brother whose character was fundamentally worthless and whose relation to her mother was the only one imaginable. Now that Sylvia was older, she did not merely despise her father's weakness; she resented the shameful position which he occupied in relation to this intruder. Mabel Bannerman belonged to that full-blown intensely feminine type that by sheer excess of femininity imposes itself upon a weak man, smothering him, as it were, with her emotions and her lace, and destroying by sensuality every trait of manhood that does not directly contribute to the justification of herself. Within a week or two Henry stood for no more in the Fitzroy Street house than a dog that is alternately patted and scolded, that licks the hand of its mistress more abjectly for each new brutality, and that asks as its supreme reward permission to fawn upon her lap. Sylvia hated Mabel Bannerman; she hated her peroxide hair, she hated her full, moist lips, she hated her rounded back and her shining finger-nails spotted with white, she hated with a hatred so deep as to be forever incommunicable each blowsy charm that went to make up what was called "a fine woman"; she hated her inability ever to speak the truth; she hated the way she looked at Monkley, who should have been nothing to her; she hated the sight of her drinking tea in the morning; she hated the smell of her wardrobe and the pink ribbons which she tied to every projection in her bedroom; she hated her affectation of babyishness; she hated the way she would make Henry give money to beggars for the gratification of an impulsive and merely sensual generosity of her own; she hated her embedded garters and smooth legs.

"O God," Sylvia cried aloud to herself once, when she was leaning out of the window and looking down into Fitzroy Street, "O God, if I could only throw her into the street and see her eaten by dogs."

Monkley hated her too; that was some consolation. Now often, when he was ready for an expedition, Henry would be unable to accompany him, because Mabel was rather seedy that morning; or because Mabel wanted him to go out with her; or because Mabel complained of being left alone so much. Monkley used to look at him with a savage contempt; and Sylvia used to pray sometimes that he would get angry enough to rush into Mabel's room and pound her, where she lay so softly in her soft bed.

Mabel used to bring her friends to the flat to cheer her up, as she used to say, and when she had filled the room she had chosen as her sitting-room (the garret was not cozy enough for Mabel) with a scented mob of chattering women, she would fix upon one of them as the object of her jealousy, accusing Henry of having looked at her all the evening. There would sometimes be a scene at the moment when half the mob would cluster around Mabel to console her outraged feelings and the rest of it would hover about her rival to assure her she was guiltless. Sylvia, standing sullenly apart, would ponder the result of throwing a lighted lamp into the middle of the sickly sobbing pandemonium. The quarrel was not so bad as the inevitable reconciliation afterward, with its profuse kissing and interminable explanations that seemed like an orchestra from which Mabel emerged with a plaintive solo that was the signal for the whole scene to be lived over again in maddeningly reiterated accounts from all the women talking at once. Worse even than such evenings were those when Mabel restrained, or rather luxuriously hoarded up, her jealousy until the last visitor had departed; for then through half the night Sylvia must listen to her pouring over Henry a stream of reproaches which he would weakly try to divert by arguments or more weakly try to dam with caresses. Such methods of treatment usually ended in Mabel's dressing herself and rushing from the bedroom to leave the flat forever. Unfortunately she never carried out her threat.

"Why don't you go?" Sylvia once asked, when Mabel was standing by the door, fully dressed, with heaving breast, making no effort to turn the handle.

"These shoes hurt me," said Mabel. "He knows I can't go out in these shoes. The heartless brute!"

"If you knew those shoes hurt, why did you put them on?" Sylvia asked, scornfully.

"I was too much upset by Harry's treatment of me. Oh, whatever shall I do? I'm so miserable."

Whereupon Mabel collapsed upon the mat and wept black tears, until Henry came and tried to lift her up, begging her not to stay where she might catch cold.

"You know when a jelly won't set?" Sylvia said, when she was recounting the scene to Monkley afterward. "Well, she was just like a jelly and father simply couldn't make her stand up on the plate."

Jimmy laughed sardonically.

These continued altercations between Mabel and Henry led to altercations with their neighbors underneath, who complained of being kept awake at night. The landlord, a fiery little Jew, told them that what between the arrears of rent and the nuisance they were causing to his other tenants he would have to give them notice. Sylvia could never get any money for the purposes of housekeeping except from Jimmy, and when she wanted clothes it was always Jimmy whom she must ask.

"Let's go away," she said to him one day. "Let's leave them here together."

Monkley looked at her in surprise.

"Do you mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

"But if we left Harry with her he'd starve and she'd leave him in a week."

"Let him starve," Sylvia cried. "He deserves to starve."

"You hard-hearted little devil," Monkley said. "After all, he is your father."

"That's what makes me hate him," Sylvia declared. "He's no right to be my father. He's no right to make me think like that of him. He must be wrong to make me feel as I do about him."

Monkley came close and took her hand. "Do you mean what you said about leaving them and going away with me?"

Sylvia looked at him, and, meeting his eyes, she shook her head. "No, of course I don't really mean it, but why can't you think of some way to stop all this? Why should we put up with it any longer? Make him turn her out into the street."

Monkley laughed. "You *are* very young, aren't you? Though I've thought once or twice lately that you seemed to be growing up."

Again Sylvia caught his eyes and felt a little afraid, not really afraid, she said to herself, but uneasy, as if somebody she could not see had suddenly opened a door behind her.

"Don't let's talk about me, anyway," she said. "Think of something to change things here."

"I'd thought of a concert-party this summer. Pierrots, you know. How d'ye think your father would do as a pierrot? He might be very funny if she'd let him be funny."

Sylvia clapped her hands. "Oh, Jimmy, it would be such fun!"

"You wouldn't mind if she came too?"

"I'd rather she didn't," Sylvia said. "But it would be different, somehow. We shouldn't be shut up with her as we are here. I'll be able to sing, won't I?"

"That was my idea."

Before Henry met Mabel he would have had a great deal to say about this concert-party; now he accepted Monkley's announcement with a dull equanimity that settled Sylvia. He received the news that he would become a pierrot just as he had received the news that, his nightgown not having been sent back that week by the laundress, he would have to continue with the one he was wearing.

Early summer passed away quickly enough in constant rehearsals. Sylvia was pleased to find that she had been right in supposing that the state of domestic affairs would be improved by Jimmy's plan. Mabel turned out to be a good singer for the kind of performance they were going to give, and the amount of emotion she put into her songs left her with less to work off on Henry, who recovered some of his old self and was often really funny, especially in his duologues with Monkley. Sylvia picked out for herself and learned a few songs, most of which were condemned as unsuitable by Jimmy. The one that she liked best and in her own opinion sang best was the "Raggle Taggle Gipsies," though the others all prophesied for it certain failure. Monkley himself played all the accompaniments and by his personality kept the whole show together; he also sang a few songs, which, although he had practically no voice, were given with such point that Sylvia felt convinced that his share in the performance would be the most popular of the lot. Shortly before they were to start on tour, which was fixed for the beginning of July, Monkley decided that they wanted another man who could really sing, and a young tenor known as Claude Raglan was invited to join the party. He was a good-looking youth, much in earnest, and with a tendency toward consumption, of which he was very proud.

"Though what there is to be proud of in losing one of your lungs I don't know. I might as well be proud because I lost a glove the other day."

Henry was severe upon Claude Raglan from the beginning. Perhaps he suspected him of admiring Mabel. There was often much tension at rehearsals on account of Henry's attitude; once, for instance, when Claude Raglan had sung "Little Dolly Daydreams" with his usual romantic fervor, Henry took a new song from his pocket and, having planted it down with a defiant snap on the music-stand, proceeded to sing:

"I'll give him Dolly Daydreams  
Down where the poppies grow;  
I'll give him Dolly Daydreams,  
The pride of Idaho.  
And if I catch him kissing her  
There's sure to be some strife,  
Because if he's got anything he wants to give away,  
Let him come and give it to his wife."

The tenor declared that Henry's song, which was in the nature of a derogatory comment upon his own, could only have the effect of spoiling the more serious contribution.

"What of it?" Henry asked, truculently.

"It seems to me perfectly obvious," Claude said, with an effort to restrain his annoyance.

"I consider that it won't hurt your song at all," Henry declared. "In fact, I think it will improve it. In my opinion it will have a much greater success than yours. In fact, I may as well say straight out that if it weren't for my song I don't believe the audience would let you sing yours more than once. "Cos no one's gwine ter kiss dat gal but me!" he went on, mimicking the indignant Claude. "No wonder you've got consumption coming on! And the audience will notice there's something wrong with you, and start clearing out to avoid infection. That's where my song will come in. My song will be a tonic. Now don't start breathing at me, or you'll puncture the other lung. Let's try that last verse over again, Jimmy."

In the end, after a long discussion, during which Mabel introduced the most irrelevant arguments, Monkley

decided that both songs should be sung, but with a long enough interval between them to secure Claude against the least impression that he was being laughed at.

At last the company, which called itself The Pink Pierrots, was ready to start for the South Coast. It took Monkley all his ingenuity to get out of London without paying for the dresses or the properties, but it was managed somehow; and at the beginning of July they pitched a small tent on the beach at Hastings. There were many rival companies, some of which possessed the most elaborate equipment, almost a small theater with railed-off seats and a large piano; but Sylvia envied none of these its grandeur. She thought that none was so tastefully dressed as themselves, that there was no leader so sure of keeping the attention of an audience as Jimmy was, that no tenor could bring tears to the eyes of the young women on the Marina as Claude could, that no voice could be heard farther off than Mabel's, and that no comedian could so quickly gain the sympathy of that large but unprofitable portion of an audience—the small boys—as her father could.

Sylvia enjoyed every moment of the day from the time they left their lodgings, pushing before them the portable piano in the morning sunshine, to the journey home after the last performance, which was given in a circle of rosy lantern-light within sound of the sea. They worked so hard that there was no time for quarreling except with competitors upon whose preserves they had trespassed. Mabel was so bent upon fascinating the various patrons, and Henry was so obviously a success only with the unsentimental small boys, that she never once accused him of making eyes even at a nursemaid. Sylvia was given a duet with Claude Raglan, and, whether it was that she was conscious of being envied by many of the girls in the audience or whether the sentimental tune influenced her imagination, she was certainly aware of a faint thrill of pleasure—a hardly perceptible quickening of the heart—every time that Claude took her in his arms to sing the last verse. After they had sung together for a week, Jimmy said the number was a failure and abolished it, which Sylvia thought was very unfair, because it had always been well applauded.

She grumbled to Claude about their deprivation, while they were toiling home to dinner (they were at Bournemouth now, and the weather was extremely hot), and he declared in a tragical voice that people were always jealous of him.

"It's the curse of being an artist," he announced. "Everywhere I go I meet with nothing but jealousy. I can't help having a good voice. I'm not conceited about it. I can't help the girls sending me chocolates and asking me to sign the post-cards of me which they buy. I'm not conceited about that, either. There's something about my personality that appeals to women. Perhaps it's my delicate look. I don't suppose I shall live very long, and I think that makes women sorry for me. They're quicker to see these things than men. I know Harry thinks I'm as healthy as a beefsteak. I'm positive I coughed up some blood this morning, and when I told Harry he asked me with a sneer if I'd cleaned my teeth. You're not a bit like your dad, Sylvia. There's something awfully sympathetic about you, little girl. I'm sorry Jimmy's cut out our number. He's a jolly good manager and all that, but he does not like anybody else to make a hit. Have you noticed that lately he's taken to gagging during my songs? Luckily I'm not at all easy to dry up."

Sylvia wondered why anybody like Jimmy should bother to be jealous of Claude. He was pleasant enough, of course, and he had a pretty, girlish mouth and looked very slim and attractive in his pierrot's dress; but nobody could take him seriously except the stupid girls who bought his photograph and sighed over it, when they brushed their hair in the morning.

The weather grew hotter and the hard work made them all irritable; when they got home for dinner at midday it was impossible to eat, and they used to loll about in the stuffy sitting-room, which the five of them shared in common, while the flies buzzed everywhere. It was never worth while to remove the make-up; so all their faces used to get mottled with pale streaks of perspiration, the rouge on their lips would cake, and their ruffles hung limp and wet, stained round the neck with dirty carmine. Sylvia lost all enjoyment in the tour, and used to lie on the horsehair sofa that pricked her cheeks, watching distastefully the cold mutton, the dull knives, and the spotted cloth, and the stewed fruit over which lay a faint silvery film of staleness. Round the room her fellow-mountebanks were still seated on the chairs into which they had first collapsed when they reached the lodgings, motionless, like great painted dolls.

The weather grew hotter. The men, particularly Henry, took to drinking brandy at every opportunity; toward the end of their stay in Bournemouth the quarrels between him and Mabel broke out again, but with a difference, because now it was Henry who was the aggressor. He had never objected to Mabel's admirers hitherto, had, indeed, been rather proud of their existence in a fatuous way and derived from their numbers a showman's satisfaction. When it was her turn to take round the hat, he used to smirk over the quantity of post-cards she sold of herself and call everybody's attention to her capricious autography that was so successful with the callow following. Then suddenly one day he made an angry protest against the admiration which an older man began to accord her, a pretentious sort of man with a diamond ring and yellow cummerbund, who used to stand with his straw hat atilt and wink at Mabel, tugging at his big drooping mustache and jingling the money in his pockets.

Everybody told Henry not to be foolish; he only sulked and began to drink more brandy than ever. The day after Henry's outbreak, the Pink Pierrots moved to Swanage, where their only rivals were a troupe of niggers, upon whom Henry was able to loose some of his spleen in a dispute that took place over the new-comers' right to plant their pink tent where they did.

"This isn't Africa, you know," Henry said. "This is Swanage. It's no good your waving your banjo at me. I know it's a banjo, all right, though I may forget, next time I hear you play it."

"We've been here every year for the last ten years," the chief nigger shouted.

"I thought so by your songs," Henry retorted. "If you told me you got wrecked here with Christopher Columbus I shouldn't have contradicted you."

"This part of the beach belongs to us," the niggers proclaimed.

"I suppose you bought it off Noah, didn't you, when he let you out of the ark?" said Henry.

In the end, however, the two companies adjusted their differences and removed themselves out of each other's hearing. Mabel's voice defeated even the tambourines and bones of the niggers. Swanage seemed likely to be an improvement upon Bournemouth, until one day Mabel's prosperous admirer appeared on the promenade and Henry's jealousy rose to fury.

"Don't you tell me you didn't tell him to follow you here," he said, "because I don't believe you. I saw you smile

at him."

Monkley remonstrated with Mabel, when Henry had gone off in a fever of rage to his room, but she seemed to be getting a certain amount of pleasure from the situation.

"You must cut it out," Monkley said. "I don't want the party broken up on account of you and Henry. I tell you he really is upset. What the deuce do you want to drag in all this confounded love business now for? Leave that to Claude. It'll burst up the show, and it's making Harry drink, which his head can't stand."

Mabel looked at herself in the glass over the fireplace and patted her hair complacently. "I'm rather glad to see Harry can get jealous. After all, it's always a pleasure to think some one's really fond of you."

Sylvia watched Mabel very carefully and perceived that she actually was carrying on a flirtation with the man who had followed her from Bournemouth. She hoped that it would continue and that her father would get angry enough with Mabel to get rid of her when the tour came to an end.

One Saturday afternoon, when Mabel was collecting, Sylvia distinctly saw her admirer drop a note into the hat, which she took with her into the tent to read and tore up; during her next song Sylvia noticed that the man with the yellow cummerbund was watching her with raised eyebrows, and that, when Mabel smiled and nodded, he gently clapped his hands and went away.

Sylvia debated with herself the advisability of telling her father at once what she had seen, thus bringing things to an immediate climax and getting rid of Mabel forever, even if by doing so the show were spoilt. But when she saw his glazed eyes and realized how drunk he was, she thought she would wait. The next afternoon, when Henry was taking his Sunday rest, Mabel dressed herself and went out. Sylvia followed her and, after ascertaining that she had taken the path toward the cliffs to the east of the town, came back to the lodgings and again debated with herself a course of action. She decided in the end to wait a little longer before she denounced Mabel. Later on, when her father had wakened and was demanding Mabel's company for a stroll in the moonlight, a letter was brought to the lodgings by a railway porter from Mabel herself to say that she had left the company and had gone away with her new friend by train. Sylvia thought how near she had been to spoiling the elopement and hugged herself with pleasure; but she could not resist telling her father now that she had seen the intrigue in progress and of her following Mabel that afternoon and seeing her take the path toward the cliffs. Henry seemed quite shattered by his loss, and could do nothing but drink brandy, while Monkley swore at Mabel for wrecking a good show and wondered where he was going to find another girl, even going so far as to suggest telegraphing on the off chance to Maudie Tilt.

It was very hot on Monday, and after the morning performance Henry announced that he did not intend to walk all the way back to the lodgings for dinner. He should go to the hotel and have a snack. What did it matter about his being in his pierrot's rig? Swanage was a small place, and if the people were not used to his costume by now, they never would be. It was no good any one arguing; he intended to stay behind this morning. The others left him talking in his usual style of melancholy humor to the small boy who for the sum of twopence kept an eye on the portable piano and the book of songs during the hot midday hours. When they looked round he was juggling with one of the pennies, to the admiration of the owner. They never saw him alive again. He was brought back dead that evening on a stretcher, his pink costume splashed with blood. The odd thing was that the hotel carving-knife was in his pocket, though it was proved conclusively at the inquest that death was due to falling over the cliffs on the east side of the town.

Sylvia wondered if she ought to blame herself for her father's death, and she confided in Jimmy what she had told him about Mabel's behavior. Jimmy asked her why she could not have let things alone, and made her very miserable by his strictures upon her youthful tactlessness; so miserable, indeed, that he was fain to console her and assure her that it had all been an accident due to Henry's fondness for brandy—that and the sun must have turned his head.

"You don't think he took the knife to kill himself?" she asked.

"More likely he took it with some idea of killing them, and, being drunk, fell over the cliff. Poor old Harry! I shall miss him, and now you're all alone in the world."

That was true, and the sudden realization of this fact drove out of Sylvia's mind the remorse for her father's death by confronting her with the instancy of the great problem that had for so long haunted her mind. She turned to Jimmy almost fearfully.

"I shall have you to look after me?"

Jimmy took her hand and gazed into her eyes.

"You want to stay with me, then?" he asked, earnestly.

"Of course I do. Who else could I stay with?"

"You wouldn't prefer to be with Claude, for example?" he went on.

"Claude?" she repeated, in a puzzled voice. And then she grasped in all its force the great new truth that for the rest of her life the choice of her companions lay with herself alone. She had become at this moment grown up and was free, like Mabel, to choose even a man with a yellow cummerbund.

## CHAPTER IV

**S**YLVIA begged Monkley not to go back and live in Fitzroy Street. She felt the flat would be haunted by memories of her father and Mabel. It was as well that she did not want to return there, for Jimmy assured her that nothing would induce him to go near Fitzroy Street. A great deal of money was owing, and he wished the landlord luck in his dispute with the furnishing people when he tried to seize the furniture for arrears of rent. It would be necessary to choose for their next abode a quarter of London to which he was a stranger, because he disliked having to make détours to avoid streets where he owed money. Finsbury Park was melancholy; Highgate was inaccessible; Hampstead was expensive and almost equally inaccessible; but they must go somewhere in the North of London, for there did not remain a suburb in the West or South the tradesmen and house-owners of which he had not swindled at one time or another. On second thoughts, there was a part of Hampstead that was neither so expensive nor so

inaccessible, which was reached from Haverstock Hill; they would look for rooms there. They settled down finally in one of a row of old houses facing the southerly extremity of the Heath, the rural aspect of which was heightened by long gardens in front that now in late summer were filled with sunflowers and hollyhocks. The old-fashioned house, which resembled a large cottage both without and within, belonged to a decayed florist and nursery gardener called Samuel Gustard, whose trade was now confined to the sale of penny packets of seeds, though a weather-beaten sign-board facing the road maintained a legend of greater glories. Mr. Gustard himself made no effort to live up to his sign-board; indeed, he would not even stir himself to produce a packet of seeds, for if his wife were about he would indicate to her with the stem of his pipe which packet was wanted, and if she were not about, he would tell the customer that the variety was no longer in stock. A greenhouse kept from collapse by the sturdy vine it was supposed to protect ran along the fence on one side of the garden; the rest was a jungle of coarse herbaceous flowers, presumably the survivors of Mr. Gustard's last horticultural effort, about ten years ago.

The money made by the tour of the Pink Pierrots did not last very long, and Jimmy was soon forced back to industry. Sylvia nowadays heard more about his successes and failures than when her father was alive, and she begged very hard to be allowed to help on some of his expeditions.

"You're no good to me yet," Monkley told her. "You're too old to be really innocent and not old enough to pretend to be. Besides, people don't take school-girls to race meetings. Later on, when you've learned a bit more about life, we'll start a gambling club in the West End and work on a swell scale what I do now in a small way in railway-carriages."

This scheme of Jimmy's became a favorite topic; and Sylvia began to regard a flash gambling-hell as the crown of human ambition. Jimmy's imagination used to run riot amid the splendor of it all, as he discoursed of the footmen with plush breeches; of the shaded lamps; of the sideboard loaded with hams and jellies and fruit at which the guests would always be able to refresh themselves, for it would never do to let them go away because they were hungry, and people were always hungry at three in the morning; of the smart page-boy in the entrance of the flats who would know how to reckon up a visitor and give the tip up-stairs by ringing a bell; and of the rigid exclusion of all women except Sylvia herself.

"I can see it all before me," Jimmy used to sigh. "I can smell the cigars and whisky. I'm flinging back the curtains when every one has gone and feeling the morning air. And here we are stuck in this old cucumber-frame at Hampstead! But we'll get it, we'll get it. I shall have a scoop one of these days and be able to start saving, and when I've saved a couple of hundred I'll bluff the rest."

In October Jimmy came home from Newmarket and told Sylvia he had run against an old friend, who had proposed a money-making scheme which would take him away from London for a couple of months. He could not explain the details to Sylvia, but he might say that it was a confidence trick on the grand scale and that it meant his residing in a northern city. He had told his friend he would give him an answer to-morrow, and wanted to know what Sylvia thought about it.

She was surprised by Jimmy's consulting her in this way. She had always taken it for granted that from time to time she would be left alone. Jimmy's action made her realize more clearly than ever that to a great extent she already possessed that liberty of choice the prospect of which had dawned upon her at Swanage.

She assured Jimmy of her readiness to be left alone in Hampstead. When he expatiated on his consideration for her welfare she was bored and longed for him to be gone; his solicitude gave her a feeling of restraint; she became impatient of his continually wanting to know if she should miss him and of his commendation of her to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Gustard, from whom she desired no interference, being quite content with the prospect of sitting in her window with a book and a green view.

The next morning Monkley left Hampstead; and Sylvia inhaled freedom with the autumn air. She had been given what seemed a very large sum of money to sustain herself until Jimmy's return. She had bought a new hat; a black kitten had adopted her; it was pearly October weather. Sylvia surveyed life with a sense of pleasure that was nevertheless most unreasonably marred by a faint breath of restlessness, an almost imperceptible discontent. Life had always offered itself to her contemplation, whether of the past or of the future, as a set of vivid impressions that formed a crudely colored panorama of action without any emotional light and shade, the intervals between which, like the intervals of a theatrical performance, were only tolerable with plenty of chocolates to eat. At the present moment she had plenty of chocolates to eat, more, in fact, than she had ever had before, but the interval was seeming most exasperatingly long.

"You ought to take a walk on the Heath," Mr. Gustard advised. "It isn't good to sit about all day doing nothing."

"You don't take walks," Sylvia pointed out. "And you sit about all day doing nothing. I do read a book, anyway."

"I'm different," Mr. Gustard pronounced, very solemnly. "I've lived my life. If I was to take a walk round Hampstead I couldn't hardly peep into a garden without seeing a tree as I'd planted myself. And when I'm gone, the trees 'll still be there. That's something to *think* about, that is. There was a clergyman came nosing round here the other day to ask me why I didn't go to church. I told him I'd done without church as a lad, and I couldn't see why I shouldn't do without it now. 'But you're growing old, Mr. Gustard,' he says to me. 'That's just it,' I says to him. 'I'm getting very near the time when, if all they say is true, I shall be in the heavenly choir for ever and ever, amen, and the less singing I hear for the rest of my time on earth the better.' 'That's a very blasphemous remark,' he says to me. 'Is it?' says I to him. 'Well, here's another. Perhaps all this talk by parsons,' I says, 'about this life on earth being just a choir practice for heaven won't bear looking into. Perhaps we shall all die and go to sleep and never wake up and never dream and never do nothing at all, never. And if that's true,' I says, 'I reckon I shall bust my coffin with laughing when I think of my trees growing and growing and growing and you preaching to a lot of old women and children about something you don't know nothing about and they don't know nothing about and nobody don't know nothing about.' With that I offered him a pear, and he walked off very offended with his head in the air. You get out and about, my dear. Bustle around and enjoy yourself. That's my motto for the young."

Sylvia felt that there was much to be said for Mr. Gustard's attitude, and she took his advice so far as to go for a long walk on the Heath that very afternoon. Yet there was something lacking. When she got home again she found that the book of adventure which she had been reading was no longer capable of keeping her thoughts fixed. The stupid part of it was that her thoughts wandered nowhere in particular and without attaching themselves to a definite object. She would try to concentrate them upon Jimmy and speculate what he was doing, but Jimmy would turn into Claude Raglan; and when she began to speculate what Claude was doing, Claude would turn back again

into Jimmy. Her own innermost restlessness made her so fidgety that she went to the window and stared at the road along the dusky Heath. The garden gate of next door swung to with a click, and Sylvia saw a young man coming toward the house. She was usually without the least interest in young men, but on this afternoon of indefinable and errant thoughts she welcomed the least excuse for bringing herself back to a material object; and this young man, though it was twilight and his face was not clearly visible, managed to interest her somehow, so that at tea she found herself asking Mr. Gustard who he might be and most unaccountably blushing at the question.

"That 'ud be young Artie, wouldn't it?" he suggested to his wife. She nodded over the squat teapot that she so much resembled:

"That must be him come back from his uncle's. Mrs. Madden was only saying to me this morning, when we was waiting for the grocer's man, that she was expecting him this evening. She spoils him something shocking. If you please, his highness has been down into Hampshire to see if he would like to be a gentleman farmer. Whoever heard, I should like to know? Why he can't be long turned seventeen. It's a pity his father isn't alive to keep him from idling his time away."

"There's no harm in giving a bit of liberty to the young," Mr. Gustard answered, preparing to be as eloquent as the large piece of bread and butter in his mouth would let him. "I'm not in favor of pushing a young man too far."

"No, you was never in favor of pushing anything, neither yourself nor your business," said Mrs. Gustard, sharply. "But I think it's a sin to let a boy like that moon away all his time with a book. Books were only intended for the gentry and people as have grown too old for anything else, and even then they're bad for their eyes."

Sylvia wondered whether Mrs. Gustard intended to criticize unfavorably her own manner of life, but she left the defense of books to Mr. Gustard, who was so impatient to begin that he nearly choked:

"Because I don't read," he said, "that's no reason for me to try and stop others from reading. What I say is 'liberty for all.' If young Artie Madden wants to read, let him read. If Sylvia here wants to read, let her read. Books give employment to a lot of people—binders, printers, paper-makers, booksellers. It's a regular trade. If people didn't like to smell flowers and sit about under trees, there wouldn't be no gardeners, would there? Very well, then; and if there wasn't people who wanted to read, there wouldn't be no printers."

"What about the people who write all the rubbish?" Mrs. Gustard demanded, fiercely. "Nice, idle lot of good-for-nothings they are, I'm sure."

"That's because the only writing fellow we ever knew got that servant-girl of ours into trouble."

"Samuel," Mrs. Gustard interrupted, "that'll do!"

"I don't suppose every writing fellow's like him," Mr. Gustard went on. "And, anyway, the girl was a saucy hussy."

"Samuel! That will do, I said."

"Well, so she was," Mr. Gustard continued, defiantly. "Didn't she used to powder her face with your Borwick's?"

"I'll trouble you not to spit crumbs all over my clean cloth," said Mrs. Gustard, "making the whole place look like a bird-cage!"

Mr. Gustard winked at Sylvia and was silent. She for her part had already begun to weave round Arthur Madden a veil of romance, when the practical side of her suddenly roused itself to a sense of what was going on and admonished her to leave off dreaming and attend to her cat.

Up-stairs in her bedroom, she opened her window and looked out at the faint drizzle of rain which was just enough to mellow the leafy autumnal scents and diffuse the golden beams of the lamps along the Heath. There was the sound of another window's being opened on a line with hers; presently a head and shoulders scarcely definable in the darkness leaned out, whistling an old French air that was familiar to her from earliest childhood, the words of which had long ago been forgotten. She could not help whistling the air in unison; and after a moment's silence a voice from the head and shoulders asked who it was.

"A girl," Sylvia said.

"Anybody could tell that," the voice commented, a little scornfully. "Because the noise is all woolly."

"It's not," Sylvia contradicted, indignantly. "Perhaps you'll say I'm out of tune? I know quite well who you are. You're Arthur Madden, the boy next door."

"But who are you?"

"I'm Sylvia Scarlett."

"Are you a niece of Mrs. Gustard?" the voice inquired.

"Of course not," Sylvia scoffed. "I'm just staying here."

"Who with?"

"By myself."

"By yourself?" the voice echoed, incredulously.

"Why not? I'm nearly sixteen."

This was too much for Arthur Madden, who struck a match to illuminate the features of the strange unknown. Although he did not succeed in discerning Sylvia, he lit up his own face, which she liked well enough to suggest they should go for a walk, making the proposal a kind of test for herself of Arthur Madden's character, and deciding that if he showed the least hesitation in accepting she would never speak to him again. The boy, however, was immediately willing; the two pairs of shoulders vanished; Sylvia put on her coat and went down-stairs.

"Going out for a blow?" Mr. Gustard asked.

Sylvia nodded. "With the boy next door," she answered.

"You haven't been long," said Mr. Gustard, approvingly. "That's the way I like to see it. When I courted Mrs. Gustard, which was forty years ago come next November, it was in the time of toolip-planting, and I hove a toolip bulb at her and caught her in the chignon. 'Whatever are you doing of?' she says to me. 'It's a proposal of marriage,' I says, and when she started giggling I was that pleased I planted half the toolips upside down. But that's forty years ago, that is. Mrs. Gustard's grown more particular since, and so as she's washing up the tea-things in the scullery, I should just slip out, and I'll tell her you've gone out to get a paper to see if it's true what somebody said about Buckingham Palace being burned to a cinder."

Sylvia was not at all sure that she ought to recognize Mrs. Gustard's opinion even so far as by slipping out and thereby giving her an idea that she did not possess perfect liberty of action. However, she decided that the point was too trifling to worry about, and, with a wave of her hand, she left her landlord to tell what story he chose to his wife.

Arthur Madden was waiting for her by his gate when she reached the end of the garden; while they wandered along by the Heath, indifferent to the drizzle, Sylvia felt an extraordinary release from the faint discontent of these past days, an extraordinary delight in finding herself with a companion who was young like herself and who, like herself, seemed full of speculation upon the world which he was setting out to explore, regarding it as an adventure and ready to exchange hopes and fears and fancies with her in a way that no one had ever done hitherto; moreover, he was ready to be most flatteringly impressed by her experiences, even if he still maintained she could not whistle properly. The friendship between Sylvia and Arthur begun upon that night grew daily closer. Mrs. Gustard used to say that they wasted each other's time, but she was in the minority; she used to say also that Arthur was being more spoiled than ever by his mother; but it was this very capacity for being spoiled that endeared him to Sylvia, who had spent a completely free existence for so long now that unless Arthur had been allowed his freedom she would soon have tired of the friendship. She liked Mrs. Madden, a beautiful and unpractical woman, who unceasingly played long sonatas on a cracked piano; at least she would have played them unceasingly had she not continually been jumping up to wait on Arthur, hovering round him like a dark and iridescent butterfly.

In the course of many talks together Arthur told Sylvia the family history. It seemed that his mother had been the daughter of a gentleman, not an ordinary kind of top-hatted gentleman, but a squire with horses and hounds and a park; his father had been a groom and she had eloped with him, but Sylvia was not to suppose that his father had been an ordinary kind of groom; he too came from good stock, though he had been rather wild. His father's father had been a farmer in Sussex, and he had just come back from staying at the farm, where his uncle had offered to give him a start in life, but he had found he did not care much for farm-work. His mother's family would have nothing to do with her beyond allowing her enough to live upon without disturbing them.

"What are you going to do?" Sylvia asked.

Arthur replied that he did not know, but that he had thoughts of being a soldier.

"A soldier?" said Sylvia, doubtfully. Her experience of soldiers was confined to Blanche's lovers, and the universal connotation in France of soldiery with a vile servitude that could hardly be avoided.

"But of course the worst of it is," Arthur explained, "there aren't any wars nowadays."

They were walking over the Heath on a fine November day about Martinmas; presently, when they sat down under some pines and looked at London spread beneath them in a sparkling haze, Arthur took Sylvia's hand and told her that he loved her.

She nearly snatched her hand away and would have told him not to be silly, but suddenly the beauty of the tranquil city below and the wind through the pines conquered her spirit; she sat closer to him, letting her head droop upon his shoulder; when his clasp tightened round her unresisting hand she burst into tears, unable to tell him that her sorrow was nothing but joy, that he had nothing to do with it nor with her, and yet that he had everything to do with it, because with no one else could she have borne this incommunicable display of life. Then she dried her tears and told Arthur she thought he had better become a highwayman.

"Highwaymen don't exist any longer," Arthur objected. "All the jolly things have disappeared from the world—war and highwaymen and pirates and troubadours and crusaders and maypoles and the Inquisition. Everything."

Gradually Sylvia learned from Arthur how much of what she had been reading was mere invention, and in the first bitterness of disillusionment she wished to renounce books forever; but Arthur dissuaded her from doing that, and they used to read simultaneously the same books so as to be able to discuss them during their long walks. They became two romantics born out of due season, two romantics that should have lived a century ago and that now bewailed the inability of the modern world to supply what their adventurous souls demanded.

Arthur was inclined to think that Sylvia had much less cause to repine than he; the more tales she told him of her life, the more tributes of envy he paid to her good fortune. He pointed out that Monkley scarcely differed from the highwayman of romance; nor did he doubt but that if all his enterprises could be known he would rival Dick Turpin himself. Sylvia agreed with all he said, but she urged the inequality of her own share in the achievement. What she wanted was something more than to sit at home and enjoy fruits in the stealing of which she had played no part. She wanted none of Arthur's love unless he were prepared to face the problem of living life at its fullest in company with her. She would let him kiss her sometimes, because, unhappily, it seemed that even very young men were infected with this malady, and that if deprived of this odious habit they were liable to lose determination and sink into incomprehensible despondency. At the same time Sylvia made Arthur clearly understand that she was yielding to his weakness, not to her own, and that, if he wished to retain her compassion, he must prove that the devotion of which he boasted was vital to his being.

"You mustn't just kiss me," Sylvia warned him, "because it's easy. It's very difficult, really, because it's very difficult for me to let you do it. I have to wind myself up beforehand just as if I were going to pull out a loose tooth."

Arthur gazed at her with wide-open, liquid eyes; his mouth trembled. "You say such cruel things," he murmured.

Sylvia punched him as hard as she could. "I won't be stared at like that. You look like a cow when you stare at me like that. Buck up and think what we're going to do."

"I'm ready to do anything," Arthur declared, "as long as you're decent to me. But you're such an extraordinary girl. One moment you burst into tears and put your head on my shoulder, and the next moment you're punching me."

"And I shall punch you again," Sylvia said, fiercely, "if you dare to remind me that I ever cried in front of you. You weren't there when I cried."

"But I was," he protested.

"No, you weren't. You were only there like a tree or a cloud."

"Or a cow," said Arthur, gloomily.

"I think that if we did go away together," Sylvia said, meditatively, "I should leave you almost at once, because you will keep returning to things I said. My father used to be like that."

"But if we go away," Arthur asked, "how are we going to live? I shouldn't be any use on racecourses. I'm the sort of person that gets taken in by the three-card trick."



"You make me so angry when you talk like that," Sylvia said. "Of course if you think you'll always be a fool, you always will be a fool. Being in love with me must make you think that you're not a fool. Perhaps we never shall go away together; but if we do, you'll have to begin by stealing bicycles. Jimmy Monkley and my father did that for a time. You hire a bicycle and sell it or pawn it a long way off from the shop it came from. It's quite easy. Only, of course, it's best to disguise yourself. Father used to paint out his teeth, wear blue glasses, and powder his mustache gray. But once he made himself so old in a place called Lewisham that the man in the bicycle-shop thought he was too old to ride and wouldn't let him have a machine."

Sylvia was strengthened in her resolve to launch Arthur upon the stormy seas of an independent existence by the placid harbor in which his mother loved to see him safely at anchor. Sylvia could not understand how a woman like Mrs. Madden, who had once been willing to elope with a groom, could bear to let her son spend his time so ineffectively. Not that she wished Mrs. Madden to exert her authority by driving him into a clerkship, or indeed into any profession for which he had no inclination, but she deplored the soft slavery which a fond woman can impose, the slavery of being waited upon that is more deadening than the slavery of waiting upon other people. She used to make a point of impressing upon Mrs. Madden the extent to which she and Arthur went shares in everything, lest she might suppose that Sylvia imitated her complaisance, and when Mrs. Madden used to smile in her tired way and make some remark about boy and girl lovers, Sylvia used to get angry and try to demonstrate the unimportance of that side of life.

"You funny child," Mrs. Madden said. "When you're older, how you'll laugh at what you think now. Of course, you don't know anything about love yet, mercifully for you. I wish I were richer; I should so like to adopt you."

"Oh, but I wouldn't be adopted," Sylvia quickly interposed. "I can't tell you how glad I am that I belong to nobody. And please don't think I'm so innocent, because I'm not. I've seen a great deal of love, you must remember, and I've thought a lot about it, and made up my mind that I'll never be a slave to that sort of thing. Arthur may be stupidly in love with me, but I'm very strict with him and it doesn't do him any harm."

"Come and sing your favorite song," Mrs. Madden laughed. "I'll play your accompaniment."

All the discussions between them ended in music; Sylvia would sing that she was off with the raggle-taggle gipsies—or, stamping with her foot upon the floor of the old house until it shook and crossing her arms with such resolution that Arthur's eyes would grow larger than ever, as if he half expected to see her act upon the words and fling herself out into the December night, regardless of all but a mad demonstration of liberty.

Sylvia would sometimes sing about the gipsies to herself while she was undressing, which generally called forth a protest from Mrs. Gustard, who likened the effect to that of a young volcano let loose.

Another person that was pained by Sylvia's exuberance was Maria, her black cat, so called on account of his color before he was definitely established as a gentleman. He had no ear for music and he disapproved of dancing; nor did he have the least sympathy with the aspirations of the lawless song she sang. Mrs. Gustard considered that he was more artful than what any one would think, but she repudiated as "heathenish" Sylvia's contention that she outwardly resembled Maria.

"Still I do think I'm like a cat," Sylvia argued. "Perhaps not very like a black cat, more like a tabby. One day you'll come up to my room and find me purring on the bed."

Mrs. Gustard exclaimed against such an unnatural event.

Sylvia received one or two letters from Jimmy Monkley during the winter, in which he wrote with considerable optimism of the success of his venture and thought he might be back in Hampstead by February. He came back unexpectedly, however, in the middle of January, and Sylvia was only rather glad to see him; she had grown fond of her life alone and dreaded Jimmy's habit of arranging matters over her head. He was not so amiable as formerly, because the scheme had only been partially successful and he had failed to make enough money to bring the flash gambling-hell perceptibly nearer. Sylvia had almost forgotten that project; it seemed to her now a dull project, neither worthy of herself nor of him. She did not attempt, on Jimmy's return, to change her own way of spending the time, and she persisted in taking the long walks with Arthur as usual.

"What the devil you see to admire in that long-legged, saucer-eyed, curly-headed mother's pet I don't know," Jimmy grumbled.

"I don't admire him," Sylvia said. "I don't admire anybody except Joan of Arc. But I like him."

Jimmy scowled; and later on that day Mr. Gustard warned Sylvia that her uncle (as such was Jimmy known in the lodgings) had carried on alarmingly about her friendship with young Artie.

"It's nothing to do with him," Sylvia affirmed, with out-thrust chin.

"Nothing whatever," Mr. Gustard agreed. "But if I was you I wouldn't throw young Artie in his face. I've never had a niece myself, but from what I can make out an uncle feels something like a father; and a father gets very worried about his rights."

"But you've never had any children, and so you can't know any more about the feelings of a father," Sylvia objected.

"Ah, but I've got my own father to look back upon," Mr. Gustard said. "He mostly took a spade to me, I remember, though he wasn't against jabbing me in the ribs with a trowel if there wasn't a spade handy. I reckon it was him as first put the notion of liberty for all into my head. I never set much store by uncles, though. The only uncle I ever had died of croup when he was two years old."

"My father didn't like his aunts," Sylvia added to the condemnation. "He was brought up by two aunts."

"Aunts in general is sour bodies, 'specially when they're in charge and get all the fuss of having children with none of the fun."

"Mr. Monkley isn't really my uncle," Sylvia abruptly proclaimed.

"Go on! you don't mean it?" said Mr. Gustard. "I suppose he's your guardian?"

"He's nothing at all," Sylvia answered.

"He must be something."

"He's absolutely nothing," she insisted. "He used to live with my father, and when my father died he just went on living with me. If I don't want to live with him I needn't."

"But you must live with somebody," said Mr. Gustard. "There's a law about having visible means of support. You couldn't have a lot of kids living on their own."

"Why not?" Sylvia asked, in contemptuous amazement.

"Why not?" Mr. Gustard repeated. "Why because every one would get pestered to death. It's the same with stray dogs. Stray dogs have got to have a home. If they haven't a home of their own, they're taken to the Dogs' Home at Battersea and cremated, which is a painless and mercenary death."

"I don't call that much of a home," Sylvia scoffed. "A place where you're killed."

"That's because we're speaking of dogs. Of course, if the police started in cremating children, there'd be a regular outcry. So the law insists on children having homes."

Sylvia tried hard to convince Mr. Gustard that she was different from other children, and in any case no longer a child; but though the discussion lasted a long time he would not admit the logic of Sylvia's arguments; in the end she decided he did not know what he was talking about.

Monkley so much disliked Sylvia's intimacy with Arthur that he began to talk of moving from Hampstead, whereupon she warned him that if he tried to go away without paying the rent she would make a point of letting Mr. Gustard know where they had gone.

"It strikes me," Monkley said, and when he spoke, Sylvia was reminded of the tone he used when she had protested against his treatment of Maudie Tilt—"it strikes me that since I've been away you've taken things a bit too much into your own hands. That's a trick you'd better drop with me, or we shall quarrel."

Sylvia braced herself to withstand him as she had withstood him before; but she could not help feeling a little apprehensive, so cold were his green eyes, so thin his mouth.

"I don't care if we quarrel or not," she declared. "Because if we quarreled it would mean that I couldn't bear you near me any longer and that I was glad to quarrel. If you make me hate you, Jimmy, you may be sorry, but I shall never be sorry. If you make me hate you, Jimmy, you can't think how dreadfully much I shall hate you."

"Don't try to come the little actress over me," Monkley said. "I've known too many women in my life to be bounced by a kid like you. But that's enough. I can't think why I pay so much attention to you."

"No," Sylvia said. "All the women you've known don't seem to have been able to teach you how to manage a little girl like me. What a pity!"

She laughed and left him alone.

There was a halcyon week that February, and Sylvia spent every day and all day on the Heath with Arthur. People used to turn and stare after them as they walked arm-in-arm over the vivid green grass.

"I think it's you they stare at," Sylvia said. "You look interesting with your high color and dark curly hair. You look rather foreign. Perhaps people think you're a poet. I read the other day about a poet called Keats who lived in Hampstead and loved a girl called Fanny Brawne. I wish I knew what she looked like. It's not a very pretty name. Now I've got rather a pretty name, I think; though I'm not pretty myself."

"You're not exactly pretty," Arthur agreed. "But I think if I saw you I should turn round to look at you. You're like a person in a picture. You seem to stand out and to be the most important figure. In paintings that's because the chief figure is usually so much larger than the others. Well, that's the impression you give me."

Speculation upon Sylvia's personality ceased when they got home; Monkley threatened Arthur in a very abusive way, even going as far as to pick up a stone and fling it through one of the few panes of glass left in the tumble-down greenhouse in order to illustrate the violent methods he proposed to adopt.

The next day, when Sylvia went to fetch Arthur for their usual walk, he made some excuse and was obviously frightened to accompany her.

"What can he do to you?" Sylvia demanded, in scornful displeasure. "The worst he can do is to kill you, and then you'd have died because you wouldn't surrender. Haven't you read about martyrs?"

"Of course I've read about martyrs," said Arthur, rather querulously. "But reading about martyrs is very different from being a martyr yourself. You seem to think everybody can be anything you happen to read about. You wouldn't care to be a martyr, Sylvia."

"That's just where you're wrong," she loftily declared. "I'd much sooner be a martyr than a coward."

Arthur winced at her plain speaking. "You don't care what you say," was his reproach.

"No, and I don't care what I do," Sylvia agreed. "Are you coming out with me? Because if you're not, you shall never be my friend again."

Arthur pulled himself together and braved Monkley's threats. On a quiet green summit he demanded her impatient kisses for a recompense; she, conscious of his weakness and against her will made fonder of him by this very weakness, kissed him less impatiently than was her wont, so that Arthur, under the inspiration of that rare caress, vowed he cared for nobody and for nothing, if she would but always treat him thus kindly.

Sylvia, who was determined to make Jimmy pay for his bad behavior, invited herself to tea with Mrs. Madden; afterward, though it was cloudy and ominous, Arthur and she walked out on the Heath once more, until it rained so hard that they were driven home. It was about seven o'clock when Sylvia reached her room, her hair all tangled with moisture, her eyes and cheeks on fire with the exhilaration of that scurry through the rain. She had not stood a moment to regard herself in the glass when Monkley, following close upon her heels, shut the door behind him and turned the key in the lock. Sylvia looked round in astonishment; by a trick of candle-light his eyes gleamed for an instant, so that she felt a tremor of fear.

"You've come back at last, have you?" he began in a slow voice, so deliberate and gentle in its utterance that Sylvia might not have grasped the extent of his agitation, had not one of his legs, affected by a nervous twitch, drummed upon the floor a sinister accompaniment. "You shameless little b—h, I thought I forbade you to go out with him again. You've been careering over the Heath. You've been encouraging him to make love to you. Look at your hair—it's in a regular tangle! and your cheeks—they're like fire. Well, if you can let that nancified milksop mess you about, you can put up with me. I've wanted to long enough, God knows; and this is the reward I get for leaving you alone. You give yourself to the first b—y boy that comes along."

Before Sylvia had time to reply, Monkley had leaped across the room and crushed her to him.

"Kiss me, damn you, kiss me! Put your arms round me."

Sylvia would not scream, because she could not have endured that anybody should behold her in such an ignominious plight. Therefore she only kicked and fought, and whispered all the while, with savage intensity! "You frog! you frog! You look like a frog! Leave me alone!"

Monkley held her more closely and forced her mouth against his own, but Sylvia bit through his under lip till her teeth met. The pain caused him to start back and tread on Maria, who, searching in a panic for better cover than the bed afforded, had run between his legs. The cat, uttering one of those unimaginable wails with which only cats have power so horribly to surprise, retired to a corner, where he hissed and growled. In another corner Sylvia spat forth the unclean blood and wiped from her lips the soilure of the kisses.

Monkley had had enough for the present. The pain and sudden noise had shaken his nerves. When the blood ran down his chin, bedabbling his tie, he unlocked the door and retired, crying out almost in a whimper for something to stop a bad razor cut. Mrs. Gustard went to the wood-shed for cobwebs; but Monkley soon shouted down that he had found some cotton wool, and Sylvia heard a cork being drawn. She made up her mind to kill him that night, but she was perplexed by the absence of a suitable weapon, and gradually it was borne in upon her mind that if she killed Monkley she would have to pay the penalty, which did not seem to her a satisfactory kind of revenge. She gave up the notion of killing him and decided to run away with Arthur instead.

For a long time Sylvia sat in her bedroom, thinking over her plan; then she went next door and asked Arthur to come out and talk to her about something important. They stood whispering in the wet garden, while she bewitched him into offering to share her future. He was dazed by the rapidity with which she disposed of every objection he brought forward. She knew how to get enough money for them to start with. She knew how to escape from the house, and because the creeper beneath Arthur's window was not strong enough to bear his weight, he must tie his sheets together. He must not bring much luggage; she would only bring a small valise, and Maria could travel in her work-basket.

"Maria?" echoed Arthur, in dismay.

"Of course! it was Maria who saved me," said Sylvia. "I shall wait till Monkley is asleep. I expect he'll be asleep early, because he's drinking brandy hard now; then I shall whistle the last line of the raggle-taggle gipsies and slither down from my window by the ivy."

She stuffed Arthur's reeling brain with further details, and, catching him to her heart, she kissed him with as much enthusiasm as might have been mistaken for passion. In the end, between coaxing and frightening him, threatening and inspiring him, Sylvia made Arthur agree to everything, and danced back indoors.

"Anybody would think you were glad because your guardian angel's gone and sliced a rasher off of his mouth," Mr. Gustard observed.

By ten o'clock all was quiet in the house. Sylvia chose with the greatest care her equipment for the adventure. She had recently bought a tartan frock, which, not having yet been worn, she felt would excellently become the occasion; this she put on, and plaited her tangled hair in a long pigtail. The result was unsatisfactory, for it made her look too prim for a heroine; she therefore undid the pigtail and tied her hair loosely back with a nut-brown bow. It was still impossibly early for an escape, so Sylvia sat down on the edge of her bed and composed herself to read the escape of Fabrizio from the Sforza tower in Parma. The book in which she read this was not one that she had been able to read through without a great deal of skipping; but this escape which she had only come across a day or two before seemed a divine omen to approve her decision. Sylvia regretted the absence of the armed men at the foot of the tower, but said to herself that, after all, she was escaping with her lover, whereas Fabrizio had been compelled to leave Clelia Conti behind. The night wore away; at half past eleven Sylvia dropped her valise from the window and whistled that she was off with the raggle-taggle gipsies—oh. Then she waited until a ghostly snake was uncoiled from Arthur's window.

"My dearest boy, you're an angel," she trilled, in an ecstasy, when she saw him slide safely down into the garden.

"Catch Maria," she whispered. "I'm coming myself in a moment."

Arthur caught her work-basket, and a faint protesting mew floated away on the darkness. Sylvia wrapped herself up, and then very cautiously, candle in hand, walked across to the door of Monkley's room and listened. He was snoring loudly. She pushed open the door and beheld him fast asleep, a red-and-white beard of cotton wool upon his chin. Then risking all in an impulse to be quick, though she was almost stifled by fear, she hurried across the room to his trunk. He kept all his money in a tin box. How she hoped there was enough to make him rue her flight. Monkley never stirred; the box was safe in her muff. She stole back to her room, blew out the candle, flung the muff down to Arthur, held her breath when the coins rattled, put one leg over the sill, and scrambled down by the ivy.

"I wish it had been higher," she whispered, when Arthur clasped her with affectionate solicitude where she stood in the sodden vegetation.

"I'm jolly glad it wasn't," he said. "Now what are we going to do?"

"Why, find a 'bus, of course!" Sylvia said. "And get as far from Hampstead as possible."

"But it's after twelve o'clock," Arthur objected. "There won't be any 'buses now. I don't know what we're going to do. We can't look for rooms at this time of night."

"We must just walk as far as we can away from Hampstead," said Sylvia, cheerfully.

"And carry our luggage? Supposing a policeman asks us where we're going?"

"Oh, bother policemen! Come along. You don't seem to be enjoying yourself nearly as much as I am. I care for nobody. I'm off with the raggle-taggle gipsies—oh," she lightly sang.

Maria mewed at the sound of his mistress's voice.

"You're as bad as Maria," she went on, reproachfully. "Look how nice the lamp-posts look. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, I can see. Let's bet how many lamp-posts we pass before we're safe in our own house."

They set out for London by the road along the Heath. At first trees overhung the path, and they passed pool after pool of checkered lamplight that quivered in the wet road. Followed a space of open country where they heard the last whispers of a slight and desultory wind. Soon they were inclosed by mute and unillumined houses on either side, until they found themselves on the top of Haverstock Hill, faced by the tawny glow of the London sky, and

stretching before them a double row of lamp-posts innumerable and pale that converged to a dim point in the heart of the city below.

"I think I'm rather frightened," Sylvia said. "Or perhaps I'm a little tired."

"Shall we go back?" Arthur suggested.

"No, no. We'll just rest a moment or two, and I'll be all right." They sat down on their bags, and she stroked Maria pensively.

Sylvia was relieved when the silence was interrupted by a policeman. She felt the need of opposition to drive away the doubts that took advantage of that first fatigue to shake her purpose.

"Now then, what are you doing?" he demanded, gruffly.

"We're sitting down," Sylvia informed him.

"Loitering isn't allowed here," the policeman said.

"Where is it allowed, please?" she asked, sweetly.

"Loitering isn't allowed nowhere," the policeman declared.

"Well, why did you say it wasn't allowed here?" she continued. "I thought you were going to tell us of a place where it was allowed."

Arthur jogged Sylvia's elbow and whispered to her not to annoy the policeman.

"Come along, now, move on," the policeman commanded. In order to emphasize his authority he flashed his bull's-eye in Sylvia's face. "Where do you live?" he asked, after the scrutiny.

"Lillie Road, Fulham. We missed the last train from Hampstead, and we're walking home. I never heard of any rule against sitting on one's own luggage in the middle of the night. I think you'd better take us to the police station. We must rest somewhere."

The policeman looked puzzled.

"What did you want to miss your train for?" he asked.

"We didn't want to miss it," Sylvia gently explained. "We were very angry when we missed it. Come on, Arthur, I don't feel tired any longer."

She got up and started off down Haverstock Hill, followed by Arthur.

"I'm sorry you can't recommend any proper loitering-places on the road," said Sylvia, turning round, "because we shall probably have to loiter about thirty-six times before we get to Lillie Road. Good night. If we meet any burglars we'll give them your love and say there's a nice policeman living on Haverstock Hill who'd like a chat."

"Suppose he had run us in?" Arthur said, when they had left the policeman behind them.

"I wanted him to at first," Sylvia replied. "But afterward I thought it might be awkward on account of Monkley's cash-box. I wish we could open it now and see how much there is inside, but perhaps it would look funny at this time of night."

They had nearly reached the bottom of Haverstock Hill, and there were signs of life in the squalid streets they were approaching.

"I don't think we ought to hang about here," Arthur said. "These are slums. We ought to be careful; I think we ought to have waited till the morning."

"You wouldn't have come, if we'd waited," Sylvia maintained. "You'd have been too worried about leaving your mother."

"I'm still worried about that," said Arthur, gloomily.

"Why? You can send a post-card to say that you're all right. Knowing where you are won't make up for your being away. In any case, you'd have had to go away soon. You couldn't have spent your whole life in that house at Hampstead."

"Well, I think this running away will bring us bad luck."

Sylvia made a dramatic pause and dropped her valise on the pavement.

"Go home, then. Go home and leave me alone. If you can't enjoy yourself, I'd rather you went home. I can't bear to be with somebody who is not enjoying himself as much as I am."

"You can't be enjoying this waking about all night with two bags and a cat," Arthur insisted. "But I'm not going home without you. If you want to go on, I shall go on, too. I'm feeling rather tired. I expect I shall enjoy myself more to-morrow."

Sylvia picked up her valise again. "I hope you will, I'm sure," she said. "You're spoiling the fun by grumbling all the time like this. What is there to grumble at? Just a small bag which makes your arm ache. You ought to be glad you haven't got mine to carry as well as your own."

After another quarter of an hour among the ill-favored streets Sylvia called a rest; this time they withdrew from the pavement into the area of an unoccupied house, where they leaned against the damp brick wall, quite exhausted, and heard without interest the footsteps of the people who went past above. Maria began to mew and Sylvia let her out of the basket. A lean and amorous tom-cat in pursuit of love considered that Maria had prejudiced his chance of success, and their recriminations ended in a noisy scuffle during which the lid of a dust-bin in the next area was upset with a loud clatter; somebody, throwing open a window, emptied a utensil partly over Arthur.

"Don't make such a noise. It was only a jug," Sylvia whispered. "You'll wake up all the houses."

"It's your damned cat making the noise," Arthur said. "Come here, you brute."

Maria was at last secured and replaced in his basket, and Arthur asked Sylvia if she was sure it was only a jug.

"It's simply beastly in this area," he added. "Anything's better than sitting here."

After making sure that nobody was in sight, they went on their way, though by now their legs were so weary that from time to time the bags scraped along the pavement.

"The worst of it is," Sylvia sighed, "we've come so far now that it would be just as tiring to go back to Hampstead as to go on."

"Oh, *you're* thinking now of going back!" Arthur jeered. "It's a pity you didn't think of that when we were on

Haverstock Hill."

"I'm not thinking at all of going back," Sylvia snapped. "I'm not tired."

"Oh no," said Arthur, sarcastically. "And I'm not at all wet, really."

They got more and more irritable with each other. The bow in Sylvia's hair dropped off, and with all the fretful obstinacy of fatigue she would go wandering back on their tracks to see if she could find it; but the bow was lost. At last they saw a hansom coming toward them at a walking pace, and Sylvia announced that they would ride.

"But where shall we drive to?" Arthur asked. "We can't just get in and drive anywhere."

"We'll tell him to go to Waterloo," said Sylvia. "Stations are always open; we can wait there till the morning and then look for a house."

She hailed the cab; with sighs of relief they sank back upon the seat, exhausted. Presently an odd noise like a fishmonger's smacking a cod could be heard beside the cab, and, leaning out over the apron to see what was the cause of it, Arthur was spattered with mud by a piece of the tire which was flogging the road with each revolution of the wheel. The driver pulled up and descended from the box to restrain it.

"I've been tying it up all day, but it will do it," he complained. "There's nothing to worry over, but it fidgets one, don't it, flapping like that? I've tied it up with string and I've tied it up with wire, and last time I used my handkerchief. Now I suppose it's got to be my bootlace. Well, here goes," he said, and with many grunts he stooped over to undo his lace.

Neither Sylvia nor Arthur could ever say what occurred to irritate a horse that with equanimity had tolerated the flapping all day, but suddenly it leaped forward at a canter, while the loose piece of tire slapped the road with increasing rapidity and noise. The reins slipped down; and Sylvia, who had often been allowed to drive with Blanche, managed to gather them up and keep the horse more or less in the middle of the road. After the cab had traveled about a mile the tire that all day had been seeking freedom achieved its purpose and, lancing itself before the vehicle in a swift parabola, looped itself round the ancient ragman who was shuffling along the gutter in pursuit of wealth. The horse chose that moment to stop abruptly and an unpleasant encounter with the ragman seemed inevitable. Already he was approaching the cab, waving in angry fashion his spiked stick and swearing in a bronchial voice; he stopped his abuse, however, on perceiving the absence of the driver, and muttering to himself: "A lucky night, so help me! A lovely long strip of india-rubber! Gor! what a find!" he turned round and walked away as fast as he could, stuffing the tire into his basket as he went.

"I wonder whether I could drive the cab properly if I climbed up on the box," said Sylvia, thoughtfully.

"Oh no! For goodness' sake, don't do anything of the kind!" Arthur begged. "Let's get down while the beast is quiet. Come along. We shall never be able to explain why we're in this cab. It's like a dream."

Sylvia gave way so far as not to mount the box, but she declined to alight, and insisted they ought to stay where they were and rest as long as they could; there were still a number of dark hours before them.

"But my dear girl, this beast of a horse may start off again," Arthur protested.

"Well, what if it does?" Sylvia said. "We can't be any more lost than we are now. I don't know in the least what part of London we've got to."

"I'm sure there's something the matter with this cab," Arthur woefully exclaimed.

"There is," she agreed. "You've just set fire to it with that match."

"I'm so nervous," said Arthur. "I don't know what I'm doing. Phew! what a stink of burnt hair. Do let's get out."

He stamped on the smoldering mat.

"Shut up," Sylvia commanded. "I'm going to try and have a sleep. Wake me up if the horse tries to walk into a shop or anything."

But this was more than Arthur could stand, and he shook her in desperation. "You sha'n't go to sleep. You don't seem to mind what happens to us."

"Not a bit," Sylvia agreed. Then suddenly she sang at the top of her voice, "for I'm off with the raggie-taggle gipsies—oh!"

The horse at once trotted forward, and Arthur was in despair.

"Oh, damn!" he moaned. "Now you've started that horrible brute off again. Whatever made me come away with you?"

"You can go home whenever you like," said Sylvia, coldly.

"What's the good of telling me that when we're tearing along in a cab without a driver?" Arthur bewailed.

"We're not tearing along," Sylvia contradicted. "And I'm driving. I expect the horse will go back to its stable if we don't interfere with him too much."

"Who wants to interfere with the brute? Oh, listen to that wheel. I'm sure it's coming off."

"Here's a cab shelter," Sylvia said, encouragingly. "I'm going to try and pull up."

Luckily the horse was ready enough to stop, and both of them got out. Sylvia walked without hesitation into the shelter, followed by Arthur with the bags. There were three or four cabmen inside, eating voluptuously in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke, steam, and burnt grease. She explained to them about the cab's running away, was much gratified by the attention her story secured, and learned that it was three o'clock and that she was in Somers Town.

"Where are you going, missie?" one of the cabmen asked.

"We were going to Waterloo, but we don't mind staying here," Sylvia said. "My brother is rather tired and my cat would like some milk."

"What did the driver look like, missie?" one of the men asked.

Sylvia described him vaguely as rather fat, a description which would have equally suited any of the present company, with the exception of the attendant tout, who was exceptionally lean.

"I wonder if it 'ud be Bill?" said one of the cabmen.

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Wasn't Bill grumbling about his tire this morning?"

"I don't know if it was his tire; he was grumbling about something."

"I reckon it's Bill. Did you notice if the gentleman as drove you had a swelling behind his ear?" asked the man who had first propounded the theory of the missing driver's being Bill.

"I didn't notice," said Sylvia.

"About the size of a largish potato?" the theorist pressed, encouragingly.

"I'm afraid I didn't notice," said Sylvia.

"It must be Bill," the theorist decided. "Any one wouldn't notice that swelling in the dark, 'specially if Bill had his collar turned up."

"He did have his collar turned up," Arthur put in.

"There you are," said the theorist. "What did I tell you? Of course it's Bill. No one wouldn't see his swelling with his coat turned up. Poor old Bill, he won't half swear when he has to walk home to-night. Here, Joe," he went on, addressing the attending tout. "Give Bill's horse a bit of a feed."

Sylvia and Arthur were given large slices of bread and butter and large cups of coffee; Maria had a saucer of milk. Life was looking much more cheerful. Presently a burly cabman appeared in the entrance of the shelter and was greeted with shouts of merriment.

"What ho, Bill, old cock! Lost your ruddy cab, old sporty? Lor! we haven't half laughed to think of you having to use your bacon and eggs to get here. I reckon you didn't half swear."

"Who are you getting at, you blinking set of mugs? Who's lost his ruddy cab?" demanded Bill.

"That's not the driver," Sylvia said.

"I thought it couldn't be Bill," said the theorist quickly. "As soon as I heard she never noticed that lump behind his ear, I thought it wasn't Bill."

"Here, less of it, you and your lumps behind the ear," said Bill, aggressively. "You'll have a blurry lump behin' your own blurry ear, Fred Organ, before you knows where you are."

Sylvia could not refrain from observing the famous lump with a good deal of curiosity, and she wondered how any one could ever have supposed it might be unnoticed. She would have described it as more like a beet root than a potato, she thought.

A long discussion about the future of the driverless cab ensued; finally it was decided that Joe the tout should lead it to the police station if it were not claimed by daylight. The company then turned to the discussion of the future of the abandoned fares. Sylvia had by this time evolved an elaborate tale of running away from a stepfather whose conduct to Arthur, herself, and Maria had been extremely brutal.

"Knocked the cat about, did he?" said the theorist, whose name was Fred Organ. "I never could abide people as ill-treated dumb animals."

Sylvia went on to explain that they had intended to throw themselves on the mercy of an aunt who lived at Dover, and with that intention had been bound for Waterloo when they lost their driver. When she was told that they were going to the wrong station for Dover, she began to express fears of the reception her aunt might accord them. Did any one present know where they could find lodgings, for which, of course, they would pay, because their mother had provided them with the necessary money.

"That's a mother all over," said Fred Organ, with enthusiastic sentiment. "Ain't it, boys? Ah, I wish I hadn't lost my poor old mother."

Various suggestions about rooms were made, but finally Fred Organ was so much moved by the emotional details with which Sylvia continually supplemented her tale that he offered to give them lodgings in his own house near Finsbury Park. Sylvia would have preferred a suburb that was barred to Monkley, but she accepted the offer because, with Arthur turning out so inept at adventure, it seemed foolish to take any more risks that night.

Fred Organ had succeeded to the paternal house and hansom about two years before. He was now twenty-six, but his corpulence made him appear older; for the chubby smoothness of youth had vanished with continual exposure to the weather, leaving behind many folds and furrows in his large face. Mr. Organ, senior, had bought No. 53 Colonial Terrace by instalments, the punctual payment of which had worried him so much as probably to shorten his life, the last one having been paid just before his death. He had only a week or two for the enjoyment of possession, which was as well; for the house that had cost its owner so much effort to obtain was nearly as ripe for dissolution as himself, and the maintenance of it in repair seemed likely to cause Fred Organ as much financial stress in the future as the original purchase had caused his father in the past.

So much of his history did Fred Organ give them while he was stabling his horse, before he could introduce them to his inheritance. It was five o'clock of a chill February morning, and the relief of finding herself safely under a roof after such a tiring and insecure night compensated Sylvia for the impression of unutterable dreariness that Colonial Terrace first made upon her mind, a dreariness quite out of accord with the romantic beginning to the life of independence of which she had dreamed. They could not go to bed when they reached the house, because Fred Organ, master though he was, doubted if it would be wise to wake up his sister to accommodate the guests.

"Not that she'd have any call to make a fuss," he observed, "because if I says a thing in No. 53, no one hasn't got the right to object. Still, I'd rather you got a nice first impression of my sister Edith. Well, make yourselves at home. I'll rout round and get the kitchen fire going."

Fred routed round with such effect that he woke his sister, who began to scream from the landing above:

"Hube! Get up, you great coward! There's somebody breaking in at the back. Get up, Hube, and fetch a policeman before we're both murdered."

"It's only me, Ede," Fred called out. "Keep your hair on."

When Sylvia saw Edith Organ's curl-papers she thought the last injunction was rather funny. Explanations were soon given and Edith was so happy to find her alarm unnecessary that she was as pleasant as possible and even invited Sylvia to come and share her bed and sleep late into the morning; whereupon Fred Organ invited Arthur to share his bed, which Arthur firmly declined to do, notwithstanding Sylvia's frown.

"Well, you can't go to bed with the girls," said Fred.

"Oh, Fred, you are a.... Oh, he is a.... Oh, isn't he? Oh, I never. Fancy! What a thing to say! There! Well! Who

ever did? I'm sure. What a remark to pass!" Edith exclaimed, quite incoherent from embarrassment, pleasure, and sleep.

"Where's Hube?" Fred asked.

"Oh, Hube!" snapped Edith. "He's well underneath the bedclothes. Trust Hube for that. Nothing'd get him out of bed except an earthquake."

"Wouldn't it, then?" said a sleek voice, and Hube himself, an extremely fat young man in a trailing nightgown, appeared in the doorway.

"You wouldn't think he was only nineteen, would you?" said Fred, proudly.

"Nice noise to kick up in the middle of the night," Hubert grumbled. "I dreamt the house was falling down on top of me."

"And it will, too," Fred prophesied, "if I can't soon scrape together some money for repairs. There's a crack as wide as the strand down the back."

Sylvia wondered how so rickety a house was able to withstand the wear and tear of such a fat family when they all, with the exception of Arthur, who lay down on the kitchen table, went creaking up-stairs to bed.

The examination of Monkley's cash-box produced £35; Sylvia felt ineffably rich, so rich that she offered to lend Fred Organ the money he wanted to repair his property. He accepted the offer in the spirit in which it was made, as he said, and Sylvia, whom contact with Monkley had left curiously uncynical, felt that she had endeared herself to Fred Organ for a long time to come. She was given a room of her own at No. 53, for which she was glad, because sleeping with Edith had been rather like eating scented cornflour pudding, a combination of the flabby with the stuffy that had never appeared to her taste. Arthur was given the choice of sleeping with Hubert or in the bath, and he chose the latter without a moment's hesitation.

Relations between Arthur and Hubert had been strained ever since. Hubert offered Arthur a bite from an apple he was munching, which was refused with a too obvious disgust.

"Go on, what do you take me for? Eve?" asked Hubert, indignantly. "It won't poison you."

The strain was not relaxed by Hubert's obvious fondness for Sylvia.

"I thought when I came away with you," Arthur said, "that we were going to live by ourselves and earn our own living; instead of which you let that fat brute hang around you all day."

"I can't be always rude to him," Sylvia explained. "He's very good-natured."

"Do you call it good-natured to turn the tap on me when I'm lying in bed?" Arthur demanded.

"I expect he only did it for fun."

"Fun!" said Arthur, darkly. "I shall hit him one of these days."

Arthur did hit him; but Hubert, with all his fat, hit harder than he, and Arthur never tried again. Sylvia found herself growing very tired of him; the universal censure upon his namby-pambyness was beginning to react upon her. The poetical youth of Hampstead Heath seemed no longer so poetical in Colonial Terrace. Yet she did not want to quarrel with him finally, for in a curious way he represented to her a link with what she still paradoxically spoke of as home. Sylvia had really had a great affection for Monkley, which made her hate him more for what he had tried to do. Yet, though she hated him and though the notion of being with him again made her shudder, she could not forget that he had known her father, who was bound up with the memory of her mother and of all the past that, being so irreparably over, was now strangely cherished. Sylvia felt that, were Arthur to go, she would indeed find herself alone, in that state which first she had dreaded, then desired, and now once again dreaded, notwithstanding her bold conceptions of independence and belief in her own ability to determine the manner of life she wished. There were times when she felt what almost amounted to a passionate hatred of Colonial Terrace, which had brought her freedom, indeed, but the freedom of a world too gray to make freedom worth possessing. She was fond of Fred Organ, and she fancied that he would have liked formally to adopt her; yet the idea of being adopted by him somehow repelled her. She was fond of Edith Organ too, but no fonder than she had been of Clara; Edith seemed to have less to tell her about life than Clara, perhaps because she was older now and had read so many books. As for Hubert, who claimed to be in love with her, he existed about the house like a large over-fed dog; that was all, that and his capacity for teasing Arthur, which amused her.

Everything about this escapade was so different from what she had planned. Always in her dreams there had been a room with a green view over trees or a silver view over water, and herself encouraging some one (she supposed it must have been Arthur, though she could hardly believe this when she looked at him now) to perform the kind of fantastic deeds that people performed in books. Surely some books were true. Looking back on her old fancies, Sylvia came to the conclusion that she had always pictured herself married to Arthur; yet how ridiculous such an idea now seemed. He had always talked with regret of the adventures that were no longer possible in dull modern days; but when the very small adventure of being in a runaway cab had happened, how miserably Arthur had failed to rise to the occasion, and now here he was loafing in Colonial Terrace. Hubert had secured a position in a bookshop near Finsbury Park railway station, which he had forfeited very soon afterward, but only because he had made a habit of borrowing for Sylvia's perusal the books which customers had bought, and of sending them on to their owners two or three days later. To be sure, they had nearly all been very dull books of a religious bent, but in such a district as Finsbury Park what else could be expected? At least Hubert had sacrificed something for her. Arthur had done nothing; even when Fred Organ, to please Sylvia, had offered to teach him to drive a hansom, he had refused to learn.

One day Edith Organ announced that there was to be a supper-party at a public house in Haringay where one of the barmaids was a friend of hers. It seemed that Mrs. Hartle, the proprietress, had recently had cause to rejoice over a victory, but whether it was domestic, political, or professional Edith was unable to remember; at any rate, a jolly evening could be counted upon.

"You must wear that new white dress, Syl; it suits you a treat," Edith advised. "I was told only to bring one gentleman, and I think it's Artie's turn."

"Why?" Hubert demanded, fiercely.

"Oh, Hube, you know you don't like parties. You always want to go home early, and I'm out to enjoy myself and I don't care who knows it."

Sylvia suspected that Edith's real reason for wishing Arthur to be the guest was his greater presentableness; she had often heard her praise Arthur's appearance while deprecating his namby-pamby manner; however, for a party like this, of which Edith was proclaiming the extreme selectness, that might be considered an advantage. Mrs. Hartle was reputed to be a woman to whom the least vulgarity was disgusting.

"She's highly particular, they tell me, not to say stand-offish. You know, doesn't like to make herself cheap. Well, I don't blame her. She's thought a lot of round here. She had some trouble with her husband—her second husband that is—and everybody speaks very highly of the dignified way in which she made him sling his hook out of it."

"I don't think so much of her," Hubert grunted. "I went into the saloon-bar once, and she said, 'Here, my man, the public bar is the hother side.' 'Oh, his it?' I said. 'Well, I can't round the corner for the crowd,' I said, 'listening to your old man singing "At Trinity Church I met my doom" on the pavement outside.' She didn't half color up, I can tell you. So he was singing, too, fit to give any one the earache to listen to him. I don't want to go to her supper-party."

"Well, if you're not going, you needn't be so nasty about it, Hube. I'd take you if I could."

"I wouldn't come," Hubert declared. "Not if Mrs. Hartle was to go down on her knees and ask me to come. So shut your mouth."

The chief event of the party for Sylvia was her meeting with Danny Lewis, who paid her a good deal of attention at supper and danced with her all the time afterward. Sylvia was grateful to him for his patience with her bad dancing at first, and she learned so quickly under his direction that when it was time to go she really danced rather well. Sylvia's new friend saw them back to Colonial Terrace and invited himself to tea the following afternoon. Edith, who could never bear the suggestion of impoliteness, assured him that he would be most welcome, though she confided in Sylvia, as they went up to bed, that she could not feel quite sure about him. Sylvia insisted he was everything he should be, and praised his manners so highly that Edith humbly promised to believe in his perfection. Arthur went up-stairs and slammed his door without saying good night.

The next morning, a morning of east wind, Arthur attacked Sylvia on the subject of her behavior the night before.

"Look here," he opened, very grandly, "if you prefer to spend the evenings waltzing with dirty little Jews, I won't stand it."

Sylvia regarded him disdainfully.

"Do you hear?" repeated Arthur. "I won't stand it. It's bad enough with that great hulking lout here, but when it comes to a greasy Jew I've had enough."

"So have I," Sylvia said. "You'd better go back to Hampstead."

"I'm going to-day," Arthur declared, and waited pathetically for Sylvia to protest. She was silent. Then he tried to be affectionate, and vowed he had not meant a word he said, but she brushed away his tentative caress and meek apology.

"I don't want to talk to you any more," she said. "There are lots of things I could tell you; but you'll always be unhappy anyway, because you're soft and silly, so I won't. You'll be home for dinner," she added.

When Arthur was ready to start he looked so forlorn that Sylvia was sorry for him.

"Here, take Maria," she said, impulsively. "He'll remind you of me."

"I don't want anything to remind me of you," said Arthur in a hollow voice, "but I'll take Maria."

That afternoon Danny Lewis, wearing a bright orange tie and a flashing ring, came to visit Sylvia. She had already told him a good deal about herself the night before, and when now she told him how she had dismissed Arthur he suggested that Monkley would probably find out where she was and come to take her back. Sylvia turned pale; the possibility of Arthur's betrayal of her address had never struck her. She cried in a panic that she must leave Finsbury Park at once. Danny offered to find her a room.

"I've got no money. I spent all I had left on new frocks," she bewailed.

"That's all right, kid; bring the frocks along with you. I've got plenty of money."

Sylvia packed in a frenzy of haste, expecting every moment to hear the bell ring and see Monkley waiting grimly outside; his cold eyes, when her imagination recalled them, made her shiver with fear. When they got down-stairs Hubert, who was in the passage, asked where she was going, and she told him that she was going away.

"Not with that—" said Hubert, barring the way to the front door.

Danny did not hesitate; his arm shot out, and Hubert went over, bringing down the hat-stand with a crash.

"Quick, quick!" cried Sylvia, in exultation at being with some one who could act. "Edie's gone round to the baker's to fetch some crumpets for tea. Let's go before she gets back."

They hurried out. The wind had fallen. Colonial Terrace looked very gray, very quiet, very long in the bitter March air. Danny Lewis with his orange tie promised a richer, warmer life beyond these ridiculous little houses that imitated one another.

## CHAPTER V

**D**ANNY LEWIS took Sylvia to an eating-house in Euston Road kept by a married couple called Gonner. Here everything—the meat, the pies, the butter, the streaky slabs of marble, the fly-blown face of the weary clock, the sawdust sprinkled on the floor, the cane-seated chairs—combined to create an effect of greasy pallor that extended even to Mr. and Mrs. Gonner themselves, who seemed to have acquired the nature of their environment. Sylvia shrank from their whitish arms bare to the elbow and glistening with fats, and from their faces, which seemed to her like bladders of lard, especially Mrs. Gonner's, who wore on the top of her head a knob of dank etiolated hair. In such an atmosphere Danny Lewis with his brilliant tie and green beaver hat acquired a richness of personality that quite overpowered Sylvia's judgment and preserved the condition of abnormal excitement set up by the rapidity and completeness with which this time she had abandoned herself to independence.

There was a brief conversation between Danny and the Gonners, after which Mr. Gonner returned to his task of cutting some very fat bacon into rashers and Mrs. Gonner held up the flap of the counter for Sylvia and Danny to



pass up-stairs through the back of the shop. For one moment Sylvia hesitated when the flap dropped back into its place, for it seemed to make dangerously irrevocable her admittance to the unknown house above; Danny saw her hesitation and with a word or two of encouragement checked her impulse to go no farther. Mrs. Gonner led the way up-stairs and showed them into a bedroom prematurely darkened by coarse lace curtains that shut out the fading daylight. Sylvia had a vague impression of too much furniture, which was confirmed when Mrs. Gonner lit a gas-jet over the mantelpiece; she looked round distastefully at the double-bed pushed against the wall, at the crimson vases painted with butterflies, at the faded oleograph of two children on the edge of a precipice with a guardian angel behind them, whose face had at some time been eaten away by mice. There was a short silence, only broken by Mrs. Gonner's whispering breath.

"We shall be all right here, kid, eh?" exclaimed Danny, in a tone that was at once suave and boisterous.

"What's your room like?" Sylvia asked.

He looked at her a moment, seemed about to speak, thought better of it, and turned to Mrs. Gonner, who told Danny that he could have the front room as well if he wanted it; they moved along the passage to inspect this room, which was much larger and better lighted than the other and was pleasantly filled with the noise of traffic. Sylvia immediately declared that she preferred to be here.

"So I'm to have the rabbit-hutch," said Danny, laughing easily. "Trust a woman to have her own way! That's right, isn't it, Mrs. Gonner?"

Mrs. Gonner stared at Sylvia a moment, and murmured that she had long ago forgotten what she wanted, but that, anyway, for her one thing was the same as another, which Sylvia was very ready to believe.

When Mrs. Gonner had left the room, Danny told Sylvia that he must go and get a few things together from his flat in Shaftsbury Avenue, and asked if she would wait till he came back.

"Of course I'll wait," she told him. "Do you think I want to run away twice in one day?"

Danny still hesitated, and she wondered why he should expect her, who was so much used to being left alone, to mind waiting for him an hour or two.

"We might go to the Mo to-night," he suggested.

She looked blank.

"The Middlesex," he explained. "It's a music-hall. Be a good girl while I'm out. I'll bring you back some chocolates."

He seemed anxious to retain her with the hint of pleasures that were in his power to confer; it made Sylvia impatient that he should rely on them rather than upon her capacity for knowing her own mind.

"I may be young," she said, "but I do know what I want. I'm not like that woman down-stairs."

"And you know how to make other people want, eh?" Danny muttered. He took a step forward, and Sylvia hoped he was not going to try to kiss her—she felt disinclined at this moment for a long explanation—but he went off, whistling.

For a long time Sylvia stood by the window, looking down at the traffic and the lights coming out one by one in the windows opposite. She hoped that Danny would not end like Monkley, and she determined to be prompt in checking the first signs of his doing so. Standing here in this room, that was now dark except for the faint transitory shadows upon the walls and ceiling of lighted vehicles below, Sylvia's thoughts went back to the time she had spent with Blanche. It seemed to her that then she had been wiser than she was now, for all the books she had read since; or was it that she was growing up and becoming an actress in scenes that formerly she had regarded with the secure aloofness of a child?

"I'm not innocent," she said to herself. "I know everything that can be known. But yet when Monkley tried to do that I was horrified. I felt sick and frightened and angry, oh, dreadfully angry! Yet when Blanche behaved as she did I did not mind at all; I used to encourage her. Oh, why am I not a boy? If I were a boy, I would show people that making love isn't really a bit necessary. Yet sometimes I liked Arthur to make love to me. I can't make myself out. I think I must be what people call an exceptional person. I hope Danny won't make love to me. But I feel he will; and if he does I shall kill myself; I can't go on living like this with everybody making love to me. I'm not like Blanche or Mabel; I don't like it. How I used to hate Mabel! Shall I ever get like her? Oh, I wish, I wish, I wish I were a boy. I don't believe Danny will be any better than Jimmy was. Yet he doesn't frighten me so much. He doesn't seem so much there as Jimmy was. But if he does make love to me, it will be more dangerous. How shall I ever escape from here? I'm sure Mrs. Gonner will never lift the flap."

Sylvia began to be obsessed by that flap, and the notion of it wrought upon her fancy to such an extent that she was impelled to go down-stairs and see if the way out was open or shut, excusing her abrupt appearance by asking for a box of matches. There were two or three people eating at the white tables, who eyed her curiously; she wondered what they would have done if she had suddenly begged their help. She was vexed with herself for giving way to her nerves like this, and she went up-stairs again with a grand resolve to be very brave. She even challenged her terrors by going into that bedroom behind and contending with its oppressiveness. So successful was she in calming her overwrought nerves that, when Danny suddenly came back and found her in his bedroom, she was no longer afraid; she looked at him there in the doorway, wearing now a large tie of pale-blue silk, as she would have looked at any brigand in an opera. When he presented her with a large box of chocolates she laughed. He wondered why; she said it was she who ought to give him chocolates, which left him blank. She tried to explain her impression of him as a brigand, and he asked her if she meant that he looked like an actor.

"Yes, that's what I mean," she said, impatiently, though she meant nothing of the kind.

Danny seemed gratified as by a compliment and said that he was often mistaken for an actor; he supposed it was his hair.

They dined at a restaurant in Soho, where Sylvia was conscious of arousing a good deal of attention; afterward they went to the Middlesex music-hall, but she felt very tired, and did not enjoy it so much as she expected. Moreover, Danny irritated her by sucking his teeth with an air of importance all through the evening.

For a fortnight Danny treated Sylvia with what was almost a luxurious consideration. She was never really taken in by it, but she submitted so willingly to being spoiled that, as she told herself, she could hardly blame Danny for thinking he was fast making himself indispensable to her happiness. He was very anxious for her to lead a lazy

existence, encouraged her to lie in bed the whole morning, fed her with chocolates, and tried to cultivate in her a habit of supposing that it was impossible to go anywhere without driving in a hansom; he also used to buy her brightly colored blouses and scarves, which she used to wear out of politeness, for they gave her very little pleasure. He flattered her consistently, praising her cleverness and comparing her sense of humor with that of other women always to their disadvantage. He told stories very well, particularly those against his own race; and though Sylvia was a little scornful of this truckling self-mockery, she could not help laughing at the stories. Sylvia realized by the contempt with which Danny referred to women that his victories had usually been gained very easily, and she was much on her guard. Encouraged, however, by the way in which Sylvia seemed to enjoy the superficial pleasures he provided for her, Danny soon attempted to bestow his favors as he bestowed his chocolates. Sylvia, who never feared Danny personally as she had feared Monkley, repulsed him, yet not so firmly as she would have done had not her first impression of the house still affected her imagination. Danny, who divined her malaise, but mistook it for the terror he was used to inspiring, began to play the bully. It was twilight, one of those sapphire twilights of early spring; the gas had not been lighted and the fire had died away to a glow. Sylvia had thrown off his caressing arm three times, when Danny suddenly jumped up, pulled out a clasp-knife, and, standing over Sylvia, threatened her with death if she would not immediately consent to be his. Sylvia's heart beat a little faster at such a threat delivered with all the additional force vile language could give to it, but she saw two things quite clearly: first, that, if Danny were really to kill her, death would be far preferable to surrender; secondly, that the surest way of avoiding either would be by assuming he would turn out a coward in the face of the unexpected. She rose from the arm-chair; Danny rushed to the door, flourishing his knife and forbidding her to think of escape.

"Who wants to escape?" she asked, in so cool a tone that Danny, who had naturally anticipated a more feminine reception of his violence, failed to sustain his part by letting her see that he was puzzled. She strolled across the room to the wash-stand; then she strolled up to the brigand.

"Put that knife away," she said. "I want to tell you something, darling Danny."

In the gloom she could see that he threw a suspicious glance at her for the endearing epithet, but he put away the knife.

"What do you want to say?" he growled.

"Only this." She brought her arm swiftly round and emptied the water-bottle over him. "Though I ought to smash it on your greasy head. I read in a book once that the Jews were a subject race. You'd better light the gas."

He spluttered that he was all wet, and she turned away from him, horribly scared that in a moment his fingers would be tightening round her neck; but he had taken off his coat and was shaking it.

Sylvia poked the fire and sat down again in the arm-chair. "Listen," she began.

He came across the room in his shirt-sleeves, his tie hanging in a cascade of amber silk over his waistcoat.

"No, don't pull down the blinds," she added. "I want to be quite sure you really have cooled down and aren't going to play with that knife again. Listen. It's no good your trying to make love to me. I don't want to be made love to by anybody, least of all by you."

Danny looked more cheerful when she assured him of her indifference to other men.

"It's no use your killing me, because you'll only be hanged. It's no use your stabbing me, because you'll go to prison. If you hit me, I shall hit you back. You thought I was afraid of you. I wasn't. I'm more afraid of a bug than I am of you. I saw a bug to-day; so I'm going to leave this house. The weather's getting warmer. You and the bugs have come out together. Come along, Danny, dry your coat and tell me a story that will make me laugh. Tell me the story of the Jew who died of grief because he bought his wife a new hat and found his best friend had bought her one that day and he might have saved his money. Do make me laugh, Danny."

They went to the Middlesex music-hall that evening, and Danny did not suck his teeth once. The next morning he told Sylvia that he had been to visit a friend who wished very much to meet her, and that he proposed to introduce him that afternoon, if she agreed. He was a fellow in a good way of business, the son of a bootmaker in Drury Lane, quite a superior sort of fellow and one by whom she could not fail to be impressed; his name was Jay Cohen. The friend arrived toward four o'clock, and Danny on some excuse left him with Sylvia. He had big teeth and round, prominent eyes; his boots were very glossy and sharply pointed at the toes, with uppers of what looked like leopard-skin. Observing Sylvia's glances directed to his boots, he asked with a smile if she admired the latest thing. She confessed they were rather too late for her taste, and Mr. Cohen excused them as a pair sent back to his father by a well-known music-hall comedian, who complained of their pinching him. Sylvia said it was lucky they only pinched him; she should not have been astonished if they had bitten him.

"You're a Miss Smartie, aren't you?" said Jay Cohen.

The conversation languished for a while, but presently he asked Sylvia why she was so unkind to his friend Danny.

"What do you mean, 'unkind'?" she repeated. "Unkind what about?"

Mr. Cohen smiled in a deprecating way. "He's a good boy, is Danny. Real good. He is, really. All the girls are mad about Danny. You know, smart girls, girls that get around. He's very free, too. Money's nothing to Danny when he's out to spend. His father's got a tobacconist's shop in the Caledonian Road. A good business—a very good business. Danny told me what the turn-over was once, and I was surprised. I remember I thought what a rare good business it was. Well, Danny's feeling a bit upset to-day, and he came round to see me early this morning. He must have been very upset, because it was very early, and he said to me that he was mad over a girl and would I speak for him? He reckoned he'd made a big mistake and he wanted to put it right, but he was afraid of being laughed at, because the young lady in question was a bit high-handed. He wants to marry you. There it is right out. He'd like to marry you at once, but he's afraid of his father, and he thought...."

Mr. Cohen broke off suddenly in his proposal and listened: "What's that?"

"It sounds like some one shouting down-stairs," Sylvia said. "But you often hear rows going on down there. There was a row yesterday because a woman bit on a stone in a pie and broke her tooth."

"That's Jubie's voice," said Mr. Cohen, blinking his eyes and running his hands nervously through his sleek hair.

"Who's Jubie?"

Before he could explain there was a sound of impassioned footsteps on the stairs. In a moment the door was

flung open, and a handsome Jewess with flashing eyes and ear-rings slammed it behind her.

"Where's Danny?" she demanded.

"Is that you, Jubie?" said Mr. Cohen. "Danny's gone over to see his dad. He won't be here to-day."

"You liar, he's here this moment. I followed him into the shop and he ran up-stairs. So you're the kid he's been trailing around with him," she said, eying Sylvia. "The dirty rotter!"

Sylvia resented the notion of being trailed by such a one as Danny Lewis, but, feeling undecided how to appease this tropical creature, she took the insult without reply.

"He thinks to double cross Jubie Myers! Wait till my brother Sam knows where he is."

Mr. Cohen had retired to the window and was studying the traffic of Euston Road; one of his large ears was twitching nervously toward the threats of the outraged Miss Myers, who after much breathless abuse of Sylvia at last retired to fetch her brother Sam. When she was gone, Mr. Cohen said he thought he would go too, because he did not feel inclined to meet Sam Myers, who was a pugilist with many victories to his credit at Wonderland; just as he reached the door, Danny entered and with a snarl accused him of trying to round on him.

"You know you fetched Jubie here on purpose, so as you could do me in with the kid," said Danny. "I know you, Jay Cohen."

They wrangled for some time over this, until suddenly Danny landed his friend a blow between the eyes. Sylvia, recognizing the Danny who had so neatly knocked out Hubert Organ in Colonial Terrace, became pleasantly enthusiastic on his behalf, and cried "Bravo!"

The encouragement put a fine spirit into Danny's blows; he hammered the unfortunate Cohen round and round the room, upsetting tables and chairs and wash-stand until with a stinging blow he knocked him backward into the slop-pail, in which he sat so heavily that when he tried to rise the slop-pail stuck and gave him the appearance of a large baboon crawling with elevated rump on all-fours. Danny kicked off the slop-pail, and invited Cohen to stand up to him; but when he did get on his feet he ran to the door and reached the stairs just as Mrs. Gonner was wearily ascending to find out what was happening. He tried to stop himself by clutching the knob of the baluster, which broke; the result was that he dragged Mrs. Gonner with him in a glissade which ended behind the counter. The confusion in the shop became general: Mr. Gonner cut his thumb, and the sight of the blood caused a woman who was eating a sausage to choke; another customer took advantage of the row to snatch a side of bacon and try to escape, but another customer with a finer moral sense prevented him; a dog, who was sniffing in the entrance, saw the bacon on the floor and tried to seize it, but, getting his tail trodden upon by somebody, it took fright and bit a small boy who was waiting to change a shilling into coppers. Meanwhile Sylvia, who expected every moment that Jubie and her pugilistic brother would return and increase the confusion with possibly unpleasant consequences for herself, took advantage of Danny's being occupied in an argument with Cohen and the two Gonners to put on her hat and coat and escape from the shop. She jumped on the first omnibus and congratulated herself when she looked round and saw a policeman entering the eating-house.

Presently the conductor came up for her fare; she found she had fivepence in the world. She asked him where the omnibus went, and was told to the Cedars Hotel, West Kensington.

"Past Lillie Road?"

He nodded, and she paid away her last penny. After all, even if Monkley and her father did owe Mrs. Meares a good deal of money, Sylvia did not believe she would have her arrested. She would surely be too much interested to find that she was a girl and not a boy. Sylvia laughed when she thought of Jay Cohen in the slop-pail, for she remembered the baboon in Lillie Road, and she wondered if Clara was still there. What a lot she would have to tell Mrs. Meares, and if the baron had not left she would ask him why he had attacked her in that extraordinary way when she went to the party in Redcliffe Gardens. That was more than two years ago now. Sylvia wished she had gone to Lillie Road with Arthur Madden when she had some money and could have paid Mrs. Meares what was owing to her. Now she had not a penny in the world; she had not even any clothes. The omnibus jogged on, and Sylvia's thoughts jogged with it.

"I wonder if I shall always have adventures," she said to herself, "but I wish I could sometimes have adventures that have nothing to do with love. It's such a nuisance to be always running away for the same reason. It's such a stupid reason. But it's rather jolly to run away. It's more fun than being like that girl in front." She contemplated a girl of about her own age, to whom an elderly woman was pointing out the St. James's Hall with a kind of suppressed excitement, a fever of unsatisfied pleasure.

"You've never been to the Moore and Burgess minstrels, have you, dear?" she was saying. "*We must* get your father to take us some afternoon. Look at the people coming out."

The girl looked dutifully, but Sylvia thought it was more amusing to look at the people struggling to mount omnibuses already full. She wondered what that girl would have done with somebody like Danny Lewis, and she felt sorry for the prim and dutiful young creature who could never see Jay Cohen sitting in a slop-pail. Sylvia burst into a loud laugh, and a stout woman who was occupying three-quarters of her seat edged away from her a little.

"We shall be late for tea," said the elderly woman in an ecstasy of dissipation, when she saw the clock at Hyde Park Corner. "We sha'n't be home till after six. We ought to have had tea at King's Cross."

The elderly woman was still talking about tea when they stopped at Sloane Street, and Sylvia's counterpart was still returning polite answers to her speculation; when they got down at South Kensington Station the last thing Sylvia heard was a suggestion that perhaps it might be possible to arrange for dinner to be a quarter of an hour earlier.

It was dark when Sylvia reached the house in Lillie Road and she hoped very much that Clara would open the door; but another servant came, and when she asked for Mrs. Meares a sudden alarm caught her that Mrs. Meares might no longer be here and that she would be left alone in the night without a penny in the world. But Mrs. Meares was in.

"Have you come about the place?" whispered the new servant. "Because if you have you'll take my advice and have nothing to do with it."

Sylvia asked why.

"Why, it's nothing but a common lodging-house in my opinion. The woman who keeps it—lady *she* calls herself—

tries to kid you as they're all paying guests. And the cats! You may like cats. I don't. Besides I've been used to company where I've been in service, and the only company you get here is beetles. If any one goes down into the kitchen at night it's like walking on nutshells, they're so thick."

"I haven't come about the place," Sylvia explained. "I want to see Mrs. Meares herself."

"Oh, a friend of hers. I'm sorry, I'm shaw," said the servant, "but I haven't said nothing but what is gospel truth, and I told her the same. You'd better come up to the droring-room—well, droring-room! You'll have to excuse the laundry, which is all over the chairs because we had the sweep in this morning. A nice hullabaloo there was yesterday! Fire-engines and all. Mrs. Meares was very upset. She's up in her bedroom, I expect."

The servant lit the gas in the drawing-room and, leaving Sylvia among the outspread linen, went up-stairs to fetch Mrs. Meares, who shortly afterward descended in a condition of dignified bewilderment and entered the room with one arm arched like a note of interrogation in cautious welcome.

"Miss Scarlett? The name is familiar, but—?"

Sylvia poured out her story, and at the end of it Mrs. Meares dreamily smoothed her brow.

"I don't quite understand. Were you a girl dressed as a boy then or are you a boy dressed as a girl now?"

Sylvia explained, and while she was giving the explanation she became aware of a profound change in Mrs. Meares's attitude toward her, an alteration of standpoint much more radical than could have been caused by any resentment at the behavior of Monkley and her father. Suddenly Sylvia regarded Mrs. Meares with the eyes of Clara, or of that new servant who had whispered to her in the hall. She was no longer the bland and futile Irishwoman of regal blood; the good-natured and feckless creature with open placket and draperies trailing in the dust of her ill-swept house; the soft-voiced, soft-hearted Hibernian with a gentle smile for man's failings and foibles, and a tear ever welling from that moist gray eye in memory of her husband's defection and the death of her infant son. Sylvia felt that now she was being sized up by some one who would never be indulgent again, who would exact from her the uttermost her girlhood could give, who would never forget the advantage she had gained in learning how desperate was the state of Sylvia Scarlett, and who would profit by it accordingly.

"It seems so peculiar to resort to me," Mrs. Meares was saying, "after the way your father treated me, but I'm not the woman to bear a grudge. Thank God, I can meet the blows of fortune with nobility and forgive an injury with any one in the world. It's lucky indeed that I can show my true character and offer you assistance. The servant is leaving to-morrow, and though I will not take advantage of your position to ask you to do anything in the nature of menial labor, though to be sure it's myself knows too well the word—to put it shortly, I can offer you board and lodging in return for any little help you may give me until I will get a new servant. And it's not easy to get servants these days. Such grand ideas have they."

Sylvia felt that she ought to accept this offer; she was destitute and she wished to avoid charity, having grasped that, though it was a great thing to make oneself indispensable, it was equally important not to put oneself under an obligation; finally it would be a satisfaction to pay back what her father owed. Not that she fancied his ghost would be disturbed by the recollection of any earthly debts; it would be purely a personal satisfaction, and she told Mrs. Meares that she was willing to help under the proposed terms.

Somewhere about nine o'clock Sylvia sat down with Mrs. Meares in the breakfast-room to supper, which was served by Amelia as if she had been unwillingly dragged into a game of cards and was showing her displeasure in the way she dealt the hand. The incandescent gas jiggled up and down, and Mrs. Meares swept her plate every time she languorously flung morsels to the numerous cats, some of which they did not like and left to be trodden into the threadbare carpet by Amelia. Sylvia made inquiries about Mr. Morgan and the baron, but they had both left; the guests at present were a young actor who hoped to walk on in the new production at the St. James's, a Nonconformist minister who had been persecuted by his congregation into resigning, and an elderly clerk threatened with locomotor ataxia, who had a theory, contrary to the advice of his doctor, that it was beneficial to walk to the city every morning. His symptoms were described with many details, but, owing to Mrs. Meares's diving under the table to show the cats where a morsel of meat had escaped their notice, it was difficult to distinguish between the symptoms of the disease, the topography of the meat, and the names of the cats.

Next day Sylvia watched Amelia put on the plumage of departure and leave with her yellow tin trunk; then she set to work to help Mrs. Meares make the beds of Mr. Leslie Warburton, the actor; Mr. Croasdale, the minister; and Mr. Witherwick, the clerk. Her companion's share was entirely verbal and she disliked the task immensely. When the beds were finished, she made an attempt with Mrs. Meares to put away the clean linen, but Mrs. Meares went off in the middle to find the words of a poem she could not remember, leaving behind her towels to mark her passage as boys in paper-chases strew paper on Hampstead Heath. She did not find the words of the poem, or, if she did, she had forgotten them when Sylvia discovered her; but she had decided to alter the arrangement of the drawing-room curtains, so that to the unassorted unburied linen were added long strips of faded green silk which hung about the house for some days. Mrs. Meares asked Sylvia if she would like to try her hand at an omelette; the result was a failure, whether on account of the butter or the eggs was not quite certain; the cat to which it was given was sick.

The three lodgers made no impression on Sylvia. Each of them in turn tried to kiss her when she first went into his room; each of them afterward complained bitterly of the way the eggs were poached at breakfast and asked Mrs. Meares why she had got rid of Amelia. Gradually Sylvia found that she was working as hard as Clara used to work, that slowly and gently she was being smothered by Mrs. Meares, and that the process was regarded by Mrs. Meares as an act of holy charity, to which she frequently alluded in a very superior way.

Early one afternoon at the end of April Sylvia went out shopping for Mrs. Meares, which was not such a simple matter, because a good deal of persuasiveness had to be used nowadays with the tradesmen on account of unpaid books. As she passed the entrance to the Earl's Court Exhibition she saw Mabel Bannerman coming out; though she had hated Mabel and had always blamed her for her father's death, past enmity fled away in the pleasure of seeing somebody who belonged to a life that only a month of Mrs. Meares had wonderfully enchanted. She called after her; Mabel, only slightly more flaccid nowadays, welcomed her without hesitation.

"Why, if it isn't Sylvia! Well, I declare! You are a stranger."

They talked for a while on the pavement, until Mabel, who disliked such publicity except in a love-affair, and who was frankly eager for a full account of what had happened after she left Swanage, invited Sylvia to "have one" at the public house to which her father in the old days used to invite Jimmy, and where once he had been surprised by

Sylvia's arrival with his friend.

Mabel was shocked to think that Henry had perhaps died on her account, but she assured Sylvia that for any wrong she had done him she had paid ten times over in the life she had led with the other man.

"Oh, he was a brute. Your dad was an angel beside him, dear. Oh, I was a stupid girl! But there, it's no good crying over spilt milk. What's done can't be undone, and I've paid. My voice is quite gone. I can't sing a note. What do you think I'm doing now? Working at the Exhibition. It opens next week, you know."

"Acting?" Sylvia asked.

"Acting? No! I'm in Open Sesame, the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels. Well, I suppose it is acting in a way, because I'm supposed to be a Turkish woman. You know, sequins and trousers and a what d'ye call it—round my face. You know. Oh dear, whatever is it called? A hookah!"

"But a hookah's a pipe," Sylvia objected. "You mean a yashmak."

"That's it. Well, I sell Turkish Delight, but some of the girls sell coffee, and for an extra threepence you can see the Sultan's harem. It ought to go well. There's a couple of real Turks and a black eunuch who gives me the creeps. The manager's very hopeful. Which reminds me. He's looking out for some more girls. Why don't you apply? It isn't like you, Sylvia, to be doing what's nothing better than a servant's job. I'm so afraid I shall get a varicose vein through standing about so much, and an elastic stocking makes one look so old. Oh dear, don't let's talk about age. Drink up and have another."

Sylvia explained to Mabel about her lack of money and clothes, and it was curious to discover how pleasant and sympathetic Mabel was now—another instance of the degrading effect of love, for Sylvia could hardly believe that this was the hysterical creature who used to keep her awake in Fitzroy Street.

"I'd lend you the money," said Mabel, "but really, dear, until we open I haven't got very much. In fact," she added, looking at the empty glasses, "when I've paid for these two I shall be quite stony. Still, I live quite close. Finborough Road. Why don't you come and stay with me? I'll take you round to the manager to-morrow morning. He's sure to engage you. Of course, the salary is small. I don't suppose he'll offer more than fifteen shillings. Still, there's tips, and anything would be better than slaving for that woman. I live at three hundred and twenty. I've got a nice room with a view over Brompton Cemetery. One might be in the country. It's beautifully quiet except for the cats, and you hardly notice the trains."

Sylvia promised that she would think it over and let her know that evening.

"That's right, dear. The landlady's name is Gowndry."

They parted with much cordiality and good wishes, and Sylvia went back to Lillie Road. Mrs. Meares was deeply injured when she was informed that her lady-help proposed to desert her.

"But surely you shall wait till I've got a servant," she said. "And what will poor Mr. Witherwick do? He's so fond of you, Sylvia. I'm sure your poor father would be most distressed to think of you at Earl's Court. Such temptations for a young girl. I look upon myself as your guardian, you know. I would feel a big responsibility if anything came to you."

Sylvia, however, declined to stay.

"And I wanted to give you a little kitten. Mavourneen will be having kittens next month, and May cats are so lucky. When you told me about your black cat, Maria, I said to myself that I would be giving you one. And dear Parnell is the father, and if it's not Parnell, it's my darling Brian Boru. You beauty! Was you the father of some sweet little kitties? Clever man!"

When Mrs. Meares turned away to congratulate Brian Boru upon his imminent if ambiguous paternity, Sylvia went up-stairs to get her only possession—a coat with a fur-trimmed collar and cuffs, which she had worn alternately with underclothing for a month; this week the underclothing was, luckily, not at the wash. Sylvia shook off Mrs. Meares's last remonstrances and departed into the balmy April afternoon. The weather was so fine that she pawned her overcoat and bought a hat; then she pawned her fur cap, bought a pair of stockings (the pair in the wash belonged to Mrs. Meares), and went to Finborough Road.

Mrs. Gowndry asked if she was the young lady who was going to share Miss Bannerman's room; when Sylvia said she was, Mrs. Gowndry argued that the bed would not hold two and that she had not bargained for the sofa's being used for anything but sitting on.

"That sofa's never been slept on in its life," she protested. "And if I start in letting people sleep anywhere, I might as well turn my house into a public convenience and have done with it; but, there, it's no good grumbling. Such is life. It's the back room. Second floor up. The last lodger burnt his name on the door with a poker, so you can't make no mistake."

Mrs. Gowndry dived abruptly into the basement and left Sylvia to find her way up to Mabel's room alone. Her hostess was in a kimono, Oriental even away from the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels; she had tied pink bows to every projection and there was a strong smell of cheap scent. Sylvia welcomed the prettiness and sweetness after Lillie Road; her former dislike of Mabel's domestic habits existed no longer; she told her of the meeting with Mrs. Gowndry and was afraid that the plan of living here might not be allowed.

"Oh, she's always like that," Mabel explained. "She's a silly old crow, but she's very nice, really. Her husband's a lavatory attendant, and, being shut up all day underground, he grumbles a lot when he comes home, and of course his wife has to suffer for it. Where's your luggage?"

"I told you I hadn't got any."

"You really are a caution, Sylvia. Fancy! Never mind. I expect I'll be able to fit you out."

"I sha'n't want much," Sylvia said, "with the warm weather coming."

"But you'll have to change when you go to the Exhibition, and you don't want the other girls to stare."

They spent the evening in cutting down some of Mabel's underclothes, and Sylvia wondered more than ever how she could have once found her so objectionable. In an excess of affection she hugged Mabel and thanked her warmly for her kindness.

"Go on," said Mabel. "There's nothing to thank me for. You'd do the same for me."

"But I used to be so beastly to you."

"Oh, well, you were only a kid. You didn't understand about love. Besides, I was very nervous in those days. I expect there were faults on both sides. I spoke to the manager about you, and I'm sure it'll be all right."

The following morning Sylvia accompanied Mabel to the Exhibition and, after being presented to Mr. Woolfe, the manager, she was engaged to sell cigarettes and serve coffee in the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels from eleven in the morning till eleven at night on a salary of fourteen shillings a week, all extras to be shared with seven other young ladies similarly engaged.

"You'll be Amethyst," said Mr. Woolfe. "You'd better go and try on your dress. The idea is that there are eight beautiful odalisques dressed like precious stones. Pretty fancy, isn't it? Now don't grumble and say you'd rather be Diamond or Turquoys, because all the other jools are taken."

Sylvia passed through an arched doorway hung with a heavy curtain into the dressing-room of the eight odalisques, which lacked in Eastern splendor, and was very draughty. Seven girls, mostly older than herself, were wrestling with veils and brocades.

"He said we was to cover up our faces with this. It is chiffong or tool, dear?"

"Oh, Daisy, you are silly to let him make you Rewby. Why don't you ask him to let you be Saffer? You don't mind, do you, kiddie? You're dark. You take Daisy's Rewby, and let her be Saffer."

"Aren't we going to wear anything over these drawers? Oh, girls, I shall feel shy."

Sylvia did not think that any of them would feel half as shy as she felt at the present moment in being plunged into the company of girls of whose thoughts and habits and sensations and manners she was utterly ignorant. She felt more at ease when she had put on her mauve dress and had veiled her face. When they were all ready, they paraded before Mr. Woolfe.

"Very good. Very good," he said. "Quite a lot of atmosphere. Here you, my dear, Emrud, put your yashmak up a bit higher. You look as if you'd got mumps like that. Now then, here's the henna to paint your finger-nails, and the kohl for your eyes."

"Coal for our eyes," echoed all the girls. "Why can't we use liquid black the same as we always do? Coal! What a liberty! Whatever next?"

"That shows you don't know anything about the East. K-O-H-L, not C-O-A-L, you silly girls. And don't you get hennering your hair. It's only to be used for the nails."

When the Exhibition opened on the 1st of May the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels was the only sideshow that was in full working order. The negro eunuch stood outside and somewhat inappropriately bellowed his invitation to the passing crowds to visit Sesame, where all the glamour of the East was to be had for sixpence, including a cup of delicious Turkish coffee specially made by the Sultan's own coffee-maker. Once inside, visitors could for a further sum of threepence view an exact reproduction of a Turkish harem, where real Turkish ladies in all the abandonment of languorous poses offered a spectacle of luxury that could only be surpassed by paying another threepence to see a faithless wife tied up in a sack and flung into the Bosphorus once every hour. Other threepennies secured admission to Aladdin's Cave, where the Genie of the Lamp told fortunes, or to the Cave of the Forty Thieves, where a lucky ticket entitled the owner to draw a souvenir from Ali Baba's sack of treasure, and see Morgiana dance a voluptuous *pas seul* once every hour. Visitors to the Hall could also buy attar of roses, cigarettes, seraglio pastilles, and Turkish Delight. It was very Oriental—even Mr. Woolfe wore a fez.

Either because Sylvia moved in a way that seemed to Mr. Woolfe more Oriental than the others or because she got on very well with him personally, she was soon promoted to a small inner room more richly draped and lighted by a jeweled lamp hanging from the ceiling of gilded arabesques. Here Mr. Woolfe as a mark of his esteem introduced regular customers who could appreciate the softer carpet and deeper divans. At one end was a lattice, beyond which might be seen two favorites of the harem, who, slowly fanning themselves, reclined eternally amid perfumed airs—that is, except during the intervals for dinner and tea, which lasted half an hour and exposed them to the unrest of European civilization. One of these favorites was Mabel, whom Mr. Woolfe had been heard to describe as his beau ideal of a sultana, and whom he had taken from the sale of Turkish Delight to illustrate his conception. Mabel was paid a higher salary in consequence, because, inclosed in the harem, she was no longer able to profit by the male admirers who had bought Turkish Delight at her plump hands. The life was well suited to her natural laziness; though she dreaded getting fat, she was glad to be relieved of the menace from her varicose vein. Sylvia was the only odalisque that waited in this inner room, but her salary was not raised, since she now had the sole right to all the extras; she certainly preferred this darkened chamber to the other, and when there were no intruders from the world outside she could gossip through the lattice with the two favorites.

Mrs. Gowndry had let Sylvia a small room at the very top of the house; notwithstanding Mabel's good nature, she might have grown tired of being always at close quarters with her. Sylvia's imagination was captured by the life she led at Earl's Court; she made up her mind that one day she would somehow visit the real East. When Mr. Woolfe found out her deep interest in the part she was playing and her fondness for reading, he lent her various books that had inspired his creation at Earl's Court; she had long ago read the *Arabian Nights*, but there were several volumes of travels which fed her ambition to leave this dull Western world. On Sunday mornings she used to lean out of her window and fancy the innumerable tombs of Brompton Cemetery were the minarets of an Eastern town; and later on, when June made every hour in the open air desirable after being shut up so long at Earl's Court, Sylvia used to spend her Sunday afternoons in wandering about the cemetery, in reading upon the tombs the exalted claims they put forward for poor mortality, and in puzzling over the broken columns, the urns and anchors and weeping angels that commemorated the wealthy dead. Every one buried here had lived on earth a life of perfect virtue, it seemed; every one buried here had been confident of another life after the grave. Long ago at Lille she had been taught something about the future these dead people seemed to have counted upon; but there had been so much to do on Sunday mornings, and she could not remember that she had ever gone to church after she was nine. Perhaps she had made a mistake in abandoning so early the chance of finding out more about religion; it was difficult not to be impressed by the universal testimony of these countless tombs. Religion had evidently a great influence upon humanity, though in her reading she had never been struck by the importance of it. People in books attended church just as they wore fine clothes, or fought duels, or went to dinner-parties; the habit belonged to the observances of polite society and if she ever found herself in such society she would doubtless behave like her peers. She had not belonged to a society with leisure for church-going. Yet in none of the books that she had read had religion seemed anything like so

important as love or money. She herself thought that the pleasures of both these were much exaggerated, though in her own actual experience their power of seriously disturbing some people was undeniable. But who was ever disturbed by religion? Probably all these tombs were a luxury of the rich, rather like visiting-cards, which, as every one knew, must be properly inscribed and follow a certain pattern. She remembered that old Mr. Gustard, who was not rich, had been very doubtful of another life, and she was consoled by this reflection, for she had been rendered faintly anxious by the pious repetitions of faith in a future life, practical comfort in which could apparently only be secured by the strictest behavior on earth. She had the fancy to invent her own epitaph: "Here lies Sylvia Scarlett, who was always running away. If she has to live all over again and be the same girl, she accepts no responsibility for anything that may occur." She printed this on a piece of paper, fastened it to a twig, and stuck it into the earth to judge the effect. Sylvia was so deeply engrossed in her task that she did not see that somebody was watching her until she had stepped back to admire her handiwork.

"You extraordinary girl!" said a pleasant voice.

Looking round, Sylvia saw a thin clean-shaven man of about thirty, who was leaning on a cane with an ivory crook and looking at her epitaph through gold-rimmed glasses. She blushed, to her annoyance, and snatched up the twig.

"What are you always running away from?" the stranger asked. "Or is that an indiscreet question?"

Sylvia could have shaken herself for not giving a ready answer, but this new-comer seemed entitled to something better than rudeness, and her ready answers were usually rude.

"Now don't go away," the stranger begged. "It's so refreshing to meet something alive in this wilderness of death. I've been inspecting a grave for a friend who is abroad, and I'm feeling thoroughly depressed. One can't avoid reading epitaphs in a cemetery, can one? Or writing them?" he added, with a pleasant laugh. "I like yours much the best of any I've read so far. What a charming name. Sylvia Scarlett. Balzac said the best epitaphs were single names. If I saw Sylvia Scarlett on a tomb with nothing else, my appetite for romance would be perfectly satisfied."

"Have you read many books of Balzac?" Sylvia asked.

The stranger's conversation had detained her; she could ask the question quite simply.

"I've read most of them, I think."

"I've read some," Sylvia said. "But he's not my favorite writer. I like Scott better. But now I only read books about the Orient."

She was rather proud of the last word and hoped the stranger would notice it.

"What part attracts you most?"

"I think Japan," Sylvia said. "But I like Turkey rather. Only I wouldn't ever let myself be shut up in a harem."

"I suppose you'd run away?" said the stranger, with a smile. "Which reminds me that you haven't answered my first question. Please do, if it's not impertinent."

They wandered along the paths shaded by yews and willows, and Sylvia told him many things about her life; he was the easiest person to talk to that she had ever met.

"And so this passion for the East has been inspired by the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels. Dear me, what an unexpected consequence. And this Hall of a Thousand and One Marbles," he indicated the cemetery with a sweep of his cane, "this inspires you to write an epitaph? Well, my dear, such an early essay in mortuary literature may end in a famous elegy. You evidently possess the poetic temperament."

"I don't like poetry," Sylvia interrupted. "I don't believe it ever. Nobody really talks like that when they're in love."

"Quite true," said the stranger. "Poets have often ere this been charged with exaggeration. Perhaps I wrong you in attributing to you the poetic temperament. Yes, on second thoughts, I'm sure I do. You are an eminently practical young lady. I won't say prosaic, because the word has been debased. I suspect by the poets who are always uttering base currency of thoughts and words and emotions. Dear me, this is a most delightful adventure."

"Adventure?" repeated Sylvia.

"Our meeting," the stranger explained.

"Do you call that an adventure?" said Sylvia, contemptuously. "Why, I've had adventures much more exciting than this."

"I told you that your temperament was anti-poetic," said the stranger. "How severe you are with my poor gossamers. You are like the Red Queen. You've seen adventures compared with which this is really an ordinary afternoon walk."

"I don't understand half you're saying," said Sylvia. "Who's the Red Queen? Why was she red?"

"Why was Sylvia Scarlett?" the stranger laughed.

"I don't think that's a very good joke," said Sylvia, solemnly.

"It wasn't, and to make my penitence, if you'll let me, I'll visit you at Earl's Court and present you with copies of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and through The Looking-glass.*"

"Books," said Sylvia, in a satisfied tone. "All right. When will you come? To-morrow?"

The stranger nodded.

"What are you?" Sylvia asked, abruptly.

"My name is Iredale—Philip Iredale. No profession."

"Are you what's called a gentleman?" Sylvia went on.

"I hope most people would so describe me," said Mr. Iredale.

"I asked you that," Sylvia said, "because I never met a gentleman before. I don't think Jimmy Monkley was a gentleman, and Arthur Madden was too young. Perhaps the Emperor of Byzantium was a gentleman."

"I hope so indeed," said Mr. Iredale. "The Palaeologos family is an old one. Did you meet the Emperor in the course of your Oriental studies? Shall I meet him in the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels?"

Sylvia told him the story of the Emperor's reception, which seemed to amuse him very much.

"Where do you live?" Sylvia asked.

"Well, I live in Hampshire generally, but I have rooms in the Temple."

"The Temple of who?" Sylvia asked, grandly.

"Mammon is probably the dedication, but by a legal fiction the titular god is suppressed."

"Do you believe in God?" Sylvia asked.

"My dear Miss Scarlett, I protest that such a question so abruptly put in a cemetery is most unfair."

"Don't call me Miss Scarlett. It makes me feel like a girl in a shop. Call me Sylvia. That's my name."

"Dear me, how very refreshing you are," said Mr. Iredale. "Do you know I'm positively longing for to-morrow. But meanwhile, dear child, dear girl, we have to-day. What shall we do with the rest of it? Let's get on top of a 'bus and ride to Kensington Gardens. Hallowed as this spot is both by the mighty dead and the dear living, I'm tired of tombs."

"I can't go on the top of a 'bus," Sylvia said. "Because I've not got any petticoats underneath my frock. I haven't saved up enough money to buy petticoats yet. I had to begin with chemises."

"Then we must find a hansom," said Mr. Iredale, gravely.

They drove to Kensington Gardens and walked under the trees to Hyde Park Corner; there they took another hansom and drove to a restaurant with very comfortable chairs and delicious things to eat. Mr. Iredale and Sylvia talked hard all the time; after dinner he drove her back to Finborough Road and lifted his hat when she waved good-by to him from the steps.

Mabel was furiously interested by Sylvia's account of her day, and gave her much advice.

"Now don't let everything be too easy," she said. "Remember he's rich and can afford to spend a little money. Don't encourage him to make love to you at the very commencement, or he'll get tired and then you'll be sorry."

"Oh, who's thinking about making love?" Sylvia exclaimed. "That's just why I've enjoyed myself to-day. There wasn't a sign of love-making. He told me I was the most interesting person he'd ever met."

"There you are," Mabel said. "There's only one way a girl can interest a man, is there?"

Sylvia burst into tears and stamped her foot on the floor.

"I won't believe you," she cried. "I don't want to believe you."

"Well, there's no need to cry about it," Mabel said. "Only he'd be a funny sort of man if he didn't want to make love to you."

"Well, he is a funny sort of man," Sylvia declared. "And I hope he's going on being funny. He's coming to the Exhibition to-morrow and you'll see for yourself how funny he is."

Mabel was so deeply stirred by the prospect of Mr. Iredale's visit that she practised a more than usually voluptuous pose, which was frustrated by her fellow-favorite, who accused her of pushing her great legs all over the place and invited her to keep to her own cushions. Mabel got very angry and managed to drop a burning pastille on her companion's trousers, which caused a scene in the harem and necessitated the intervention of Mr. Woolfe.

"She did it for the purpose, the spiteful thing," the outraged favorite declared. "Behaves more like a performing seal than a Turkish lady, and then burns my costume. No, it's no good trying to 'my dear' me. I've stood it long enough and I'm not going to stand it no longer."

Mabel expressed an opinion that the rival favorite was a vulgar person; luckily, before Mr. Iredale arrived the quarrel had been adjusted, and when he sat down on the divan and received a cup of coffee from Sylvia, whose brown eyes twinkled merry recognition above her yashmak, the two favorites were languorously fanning the perfumed airs of their seclusion, once again in drowsy accord.

Mr. Iredale came often to the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels; he never failed to bring with him books for Sylvia and he was always eager to discuss with her what she had last read. On Sundays he used to take her out to Richmond or Kew, but he never invited her to visit him at his rooms.

"He's awfully gone on you," said Mabel. "Well, I wish you the best of luck, I'm sure, for he's a very nice fellow."

Mr. Iredale was not quite so enthusiastic over Mabel; he often questioned Sylvia about her friend's conduct and seemed much disturbed by the materialism and looseness of her attitude toward life.

"It seems dreadful," he used to say to her, "that you can't find a worthier friend than that blond enormity. I hope she never introduces you to any of her men."

Sylvia assured him that Mabel was much too jealous to do anything of the sort.

"Jealous!" he ejaculated. "How monstrous that a child like you should already be established in competition with that. Ugh!"

June passed away to July. Mr. Iredale told Sylvia that he ought to be in the country by now and that he could not understand himself. One day he asked her if she would like to live in the country, and became lost in meditation when she said she might. Sylvia delighted in his company and had a deep affection for this man who had so wonderfully entered into her life without once shocking her sensibility or her pride. She understood, however, that it was easy for him to behave himself, because he had all he wanted; nevertheless the companionship of a man of leisure had for herself such charm that she did not feel attracted to any deeper reflection upon moral causes; he was lucky to be what he was, but she was equally lucky to have found him for a friend.

Sometimes when he inveighed against her past associates and what he called her unhappy bringing up, she felt impelled to defend them.

"You see, you have all you want, Philip."

Sylvia had learned with considerable difficulty to call him Philip; she could never get rid of the idea that he was much older than herself and that people who heard her call him by his Christian name would laugh. Even now she could only call him Philip when the importance of the remark was enough to hide what still seemed an unpardonable kind of pertness.

"You think I have all I want, do you?" he answered, a little bitterly. "My dear child, I'm in the most humiliating position in which a man can find himself. There is only one thing I want, but I'm afraid to make the effort to secure it: I'm afraid of being laughed at. Sylvia dear, you were wiser than you knew when you objected to calling me Philip for that very reason. I wish I could spread my canvas to a soldier's wind like you and sail into life, but I can't. I've been



taught to tack, and I've never learned how to reach harbor. I suppose some people, in spite of our system of education, succeed in learning," he sighed.

"I don't understand a bit what you're talking about," she said.

"Don't you? It doesn't matter. I was really talking to myself, which is very rude. Impose a penalty."

"Admit you have everything you want," Sylvia insisted. "And don't be always running down poor Jimmy and my father and every one I've ever known."

"From their point of view I confess I have everything I want," he agreed.

On another occasion Sylvia asked him if he did not think she ought to consider religion more than she had done. Being so much in Philip's company was giving her a desire to experiment with the habits of well-regulated people, and she was perplexed to find that he paid no attention to church-going.

"Ah, there you can congratulate yourself," he said, emphatically. "Whatever was deplorable in your bringing up, at least you escaped that damnable imposition, that fraudulent attempt to flatter man beyond his deserts."

"Oh, don't use so many long words all at once," Sylvia begged. "I like a long word now and then, because I'm collecting long words, but I can't collect them and understand what you're talking about at the same time. Do you think I ought to go to church?"

"No, no, a thousand times no," Philip replied. "You've luckily escaped from religion as a social observance. Do you feel the need for it? Have you ineffable longings?"

"I know that word," Sylvia said. "It means something that can't be said in words, doesn't it? Well, I've often had longings like that, especially in Hampstead, but no longings that had anything to do with going to church. How could they have, if they were ineffable?"

"Quite true," Philip agreed. "And therefore be grateful that you're a pagan. If ever a confounded priest gets hold of you and tries to bewitch you with his mumbo-jumbo, send for me and I'll settle him. No, no, going to church of one's own free will is either a drug (sometimes a stimulant, sometimes a narcotic) or it's mere snobbery. In either case it is a futile waste of time, because there are so many problems in this world—you're one of the most urgent—that it's criminal to avoid their solution by speculating upon the problem of the next world, which is insoluble."

"But is there another world?" she asked.

"I don't think so."

"And all those announcements in the cemetery meant nothing?"

"Nothing but human vanity—the vanity of the dead and the vanity of the living."

"Thanks," Sylvia said. "I thought that was probably the explanation."

Mabel, who had long ago admitted that Philip was just as funny as Sylvia had described him, often used to ask her what they found to talk about.

"He can't be interested in Earl's Court, and you're such a kid. I can't understand it."

"Well, we talked about religion to-day," Sylvia told her.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Mabel said, very knowingly. "He's one of those fellows who ought to have been a clergyman, is he? I knew he reminded me of some one. He's the walking image of the clergyman where we used to live in Clapham. But you be careful, Sylvia. It's an old trick, that."

"You're quite wrong. He hates clergymen."

"Oh," Mabel exclaimed, taken aback for a moment, but quickly recovering herself. "Oh, well, people always pretend to hate what they can't get. And I dare say he wanted to be a clergyman. But don't let him try to convert you. It's an old trick to get something for nothing. And I know, my dear."

July passed away into August, and Sylvia, buried for so many hours in the airless Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels, was flagging visibly. Philip used to spend nearly every afternoon and evening in the inner room where she worked—so many, indeed, that Mr. Woolfe protested and told her he would really have to put her back into the outer hall, because good customers were being annoyed by her admirer's glaring at them through his glasses.

Philip was very much worried by Sylvia's wan looks, and urged her more insistently to leave her job, and let him provide for her. But having vowed to herself that never again would she put herself under an obligation to anybody, she would not hear of leaving the Exhibition.

One Sunday in the middle of August Philip took Sylvia to Oxford, of which he had often talked to her. She enjoyed the day very much and delighted him by the interest she took in all the colleges they visited; but he was very much worried, so he said, by the approach of age.

"You aren't so very old," Sylvia reassured him. "Old, but not very old."

"Fifteen years older than you," he sighed.

"Still, you're not old enough to be my father," she added, encouragingly.

In the afternoon they went to St. Mary's Walks and sat upon a bench by the Cherwell. Close at hand a Sabbath bell chimed a golden monotone; Philip took Sylvia's hand and looked right into her face, as he always did when he was not wearing his glasses:

"Little delightful thing, if you won't let me take you away from that inferno of Earl's Court, will you marry me? Not at once, because it wouldn't be fair to you and it wouldn't be fair to myself. I'm going to make a suggestion that will make you laugh, but it is quite a serious suggestion. I want you to go to school."

Sylvia drew back and stared at him over her shoulder.

"To school?" she echoed. "But I'm sixteen."

"Lots of girls—most girls in the position I want you to take—are still at school then. Only a year, dear child, and then if you will have me, we'll get married. I don't think you'd be bored down in Hampshire. I have thousands of books and you shall read them all. Don't get into your head that I'm asking you to marry me because I'm sorry for you—"

"There's nothing to be sorry for," Sylvia interrupted, sharply.

"I know there's not, and I want you terribly. You fascinate me to an extent I never could have thought possible for any woman. I really haven't cared much about women; they always seemed in the way. I do believe you would be

happy with me. We'll travel to the East together. You shall visit Japan and Turkey. I love you so much, Sylvia. Tell me, don't you love me a little?"

"I like you very much indeed," she answered, gently. "Oh, very, very, very much. Perhaps I love you. I don't think I love you, because if I loved you I think my heart would beat much faster when you asked me to marry you, and it isn't beating at all. Feel."

She put his hand upon her heart.

"It certainly doesn't seem to be unusually rapid," he agreed.

Sylvia looked at him in perplexity. His thin face was flushed, and the golden light of the afternoon gave it a warmer glow; his very blue eyes without their glasses had such a wide-open pleading expression; she was touched by his kindness.

"If you think I ought to go to school," she offered, "I will go to school."

He looked at her with a question in his eyes. She saw that he wanted to kiss her, and she pretended she thought he was dissatisfied with her answer about school.

"I won't promise to marry you," she said. "Because I like to keep promises and I can't say now what I shall be like in a year, can I? I'm changing all the time. Only I do like you very, very, very much. Don't forget that."

He took her hand and kissed it with the courtesy that for her was almost his greatest charm; manners seemed to Sylvia the chief difference between Philip and all the other people she had known. Once he had told her she had very bad manners, and she had lain awake half the night in her chagrin. She divined that the real reason of his wanting her to go to school was his wish to correct her manners. How little she knew about him, and yet she had been asked to marry him. His father and mother were dead, but he had a sister whom she would have to meet.

"Have you told your sister about me?" Sylvia asked.

"Not yet," he confessed. "I think I won't tell anybody about you except the lady to whose care I am going to intrust you."

Sylvia asked him how long he had made up his mind to ask her to marry him, and he told her he had been thinking about it for a long time, but that he had always been afraid at the last moment.

"Afraid I should disgrace you, I suppose?" Sylvia said.

He put on his glasses and coughed, a sure sign he was embarrassed. She laughed.

"And of course there's no doubt that I *should* disgrace you. I probably shall now as a matter of fact. Mabel will be rather sorry," she went on, pensively. "She likes me to be there at night in case she gets frightened. She told me once that the only reason she ever went wrong was because she was frightened to sleep alone. She was married to a commercial traveler, who, of course, was just the worst person she could have married, because he was always leaving her alone. Poor Mabel!"

Philip took her hand again and said in a tone of voice which she resented as adumbrating already, however faintly, a hint of ownership:

"Sylvia dear, you won't talk so freely as that in the school, will you? Promise me you won't."

"But it used to amuse you when I talked like that," she said. "You mustn't think now that you've got the right to lecture me."

"My dear child, it doesn't matter what you say to me; I understand. But some people might not."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you," she almost sighed.

## CHAPTER VI

MISS ASHLEY'S school for young ladies, situated in its own grounds on Campden Hill, was considered one of the best in England; a day or two after they got back from Oxford, Philip announced to Sylvia that he was glad to say Miss Ashley would take her as a pupil. She was a friend of his family; but he had sworn her to secrecy, and it had been decided between them that Sylvia should be supposed to be an orphan educated until now in France.

"Mayn't I tell the other girls that I've been an odalisque?" Sylvia asked.

"Good heavens! no!" said Philip, earnestly.

"But I was looking forward to telling them," she explained. "Because I'm sure it would amuse them."

Philip smiled indulgently and thought she would find lots of other ways of amusing them. He had told Miss Ashley, who, by the way, was an enthusiastic rationalist, that he did not want her to attend the outward shows of religion, and Miss Ashley had assented, though as a schoolmistress she was bound to see that her other pupils went to church at least once every Sunday. He had reassured her about the bad example Sylvia would set by promising to come himself and take her out every Sunday in his capacity as guardian.

"You'll be glad of that, won't you?" he asked, anxiously.

"I expect so," Sylvia said. "But of course I may find being at school such fun that I sha'n't want to leave it."

Again Philip smiled indulgently and hoped she would. Of course, it was now holiday-time, but Miss Ashley had quite agreed with him in the desirableness of Sylvia's going to Hornton House before the term began. She would be able to help her to equip herself with all the things a school-girl required. He knew, for instance, that she was short of various articles of clothing. Sylvia could take Miss Ashley completely into her confidence, but even with her he advised a certain reticence with regard to some of her adventures. She was of course a woman of infinite experience and extremely broad-minded, but many years as a schoolmistress might have made her consider some things were better left unsaid; there were some people, particularly English people, who were much upset by details. Perhaps Sylvia would spare her the details?

"You see, my dear child, you've had an extraordinary number of odd adventures for your age, and they've made you what you are, you dear. But now is the chance of setting them in their right relation to your future life. You know, I'm tremendously keen about this one year's formal education. You're just the material that can be perfected by academic methods, which with ordinary material end in mere barren decoration."

"I don't understand. I don't understand," Sylvia interrupted.

"Sorry! My hobby-horse has bolted with me and left you behind. But I won't try to explain or even to advise. I leave everything to you. After all, you are you; and I'm the last person to wish you to be any one else."

Philip was humming excitedly when they drove up to Hornton House, and Sylvia was certainly much impressed by its Palladian grandeur and the garden that seemed to spread illimitably behind it. She felt rather shy of Miss Ashley herself, who was apparently still in her dressing-gown, a green-linen dressing-gown worked in front with what Sylvia considered were very bad reproductions of flowers in brownish silk. She was astonished at seeing a woman of Miss Ashley's dignity still in her dressing-gown at three o'clock in the afternoon, but she was still more astonished to see her in a rather battered straw hat, apparently ready to go shopping in Kensington High Street without changing her attire. She looked at Philip, who, however, seemed unaware of anything unusual. A carriage was waiting for them when they went out, and Philip left her with Miss Ashley, promising to dine at Hornton House that night.

The afternoon passed away rapidly in making all sorts of purchases, even of trunks; it seemed to Sylvia that thousands of pounds must have been spent upon her outfit, and she felt a thrill of pride. Everybody behind the various counters treated Miss Ashley with great deference; Sylvia was bound to admit that, however careless she might be of her own appearance, she was splendidly able to help other people to choose jolly things. They drove back to Hornton House in a carriage that seemed full of parcels, though they only took with them what Miss Ashley considered immediately important. Tea was waiting in the garden under a great cedar-tree; and by the time tea was finished Sylvia was sure that she should like Miss Ashley and that she should not run away that night, which she had made up her mind to do unless she was absolutely contented with the prospect of her new existence. She liked her bedroom very much, and the noise that the sparrows made in the creeper outside her window. The starched maid-servant who came to help her dress for dinner rather frightened her, but she decided to be very French in order to take away the least excuse for ridicule.

Sylvia thought at dinner that the prospect of marriage had made Philip seem even older, or perhaps it was his assumption of guardianship which gave him this added seriousness.

"Of course, French she already knows," he was saying, "though it might be as well to revise her grammar a little. History she has a queer, disjointed knowledge of—it would be as well to fill in the gaps. I should like her to learn a little Latin. Then there are mathematics and what is called science. Of course, one would like her to have a general acquaintance with both, but I don't want to waste time with too much elementary stuff. It would be almost better for her to be completely ignorant of either."

"I think you will have to leave the decision to me, Philip," said Miss Ashley, in that almost too deliberately tranquil voice, which Sylvia felt might so easily become in certain circumstances exasperating. "I think you may rely on my judgment where girls are concerned."

Philip hastened to assure Miss Ashley that he was not presuming to dictate to her greater experience of education; he only wished to lay stress on the subjects that he considered would be most valuable for the life Sylvia was likely to lead.

"I have a class," said Miss Ashley, "which is composed of older girls and of which the routine is sufficiently elastic to fit any individual case. I take that class myself."

Sylvia half expected that Miss Ashley would suggest including Philip in it, if he went on talking any longer. Perhaps Philip himself suspected as much, for he said no more about Sylvia's education and talked instead about the gravity of the situation in South Africa.

Sylvia was vividly aware of the comfort of her bedroom and of the extraordinary freshness of it in comparison with all the other rooms she had so far inhabited. Miss Ashley faintly reminded her of her mother, not that there was the least outward resemblance except in height, for Miss Ashley's hair was gray, whereas her mother's until the day of her death had kept all its lustrous darkness. Yet both wore their hair in similar fashion, combed up high from the forehead so as to give them a majestic appearance. Her mother's eyes had been of a deep and glowing brown set in that pale face; Miss Ashley's eyes were small and gray, and her complexion had the hard rosiness of an apple. The likeness between the two women lay rather in the possession of a natural authority which warned one that disobedience would be an undertaking and defiance an impossibility. Sylvia rejoiced in the idea of being under control; it was invigorating, like the delicious torment of a cold bath. Of course she had no intention of being controlled in big things, but she was determined to submit over little things for the sheer pleasure of submitting to Miss Ashley, who was, moreover, likely to be always right. In the morning, when she came down in one of her new frocks, her hair tied back with a big brown bow, and found Miss Ashley sitting in the sunny green window of the dining-room, reading the *Morning Post*, she congratulated herself upon the positive pleasure that such a getting up was able to give her and upon this new sense of spaciousness that such a beginning of the day was able to provide.

"You're looking at my dress," said Miss Ashley, pleasantly. "When you're my age you'll abandon fashion and adopt what is comfortable and becoming."

"I thought it was a dressing-gown yesterday," Sylvia admitted.

"Rather an elaborate dressing-gown." Miss Ashley laughed. "I'm not so vain as all that."

Sylvia wondered what she would have said to some of Mabel's dressing-gowns. Now that she was growing used to Miss Ashley's attire, she began to think she rather liked it. This gown of peacock-blue linen was certainly attractive, and the flowers embroidered upon its front were clearly recognizable as daisies.

During the fortnight before school reopened Sylvia gave Miss Ashley a good deal of her confidence, and found her much less shocked by her experiences than Philip had been. She told her that she felt rather ungrateful in so abruptly cutting herself off from Mabel, who had been very kind to her; but on this point Miss Ashley was firm in her agreement with Philip, and would not hear of Sylvia's making any attempt to see Mabel again.

"You are lucky, my dear, in having only one person whose friendship you are forced to give up, as it seems to you, a little harshly. Great changes are rarely made with so slight an effort of separation. I am not in favor personally of violent uprootings and replantings, and it was only because you were in such a solitary position that I consented to do what Philip asked. Your friend Mabel was, I am sure, exceedingly kind to you; but you are much too young to repay her kindness. It is the privilege of the very young to be heartless. From what you have told me, you have often been heartless about other people, so I don't think you need worry about Mabel. Besides, let me assure you that

Mabel herself would be far from enjoying any association with you that included Hornton House."

Sylvia had no arguments to bring forward against Miss Ashley; nevertheless, she felt guilty of treating Mabel shabbily, and wished that she could have explained to her that it was not really her fault.

Miss Ashley took her once or twice to the play, which Sylvia enjoyed more than music-halls. In the library at Hornton House she found plenty of books to read, and Miss Ashley was willing to talk about them in a very interesting way. Philip came often to see her and told her how much Miss Ashley liked her and how pleased they both were to see her settling down so easily and quickly.

The night before term began the four assistant mistresses arrived; their names were Miss Pinck, Miss Primer, Miss Hossack, and Miss Lee. Sylvia was by this time sufficiently at home in Hornton House to survive the ordeal of introduction without undue embarrassment, though, to Miss Ashley's amusement, she strengthened her French accent. Miss Pinck, the senior assistant mistress, was a very small woman with a sharp chin and knotted fingers, two features which contrasted noticeably with her general plumpness. She taught History and English Literature and had an odd habit, when she was speaking, of suddenly putting her hands behind her back, shooting her chin forward, and screwing up her eyes so fiercely that the person addressed involuntarily drew back in alarm. Sylvia, to whom this gesture became very familiar, used to wonder if in the days of her vanity Miss Pinck had cultivated it to avoid displaying her fingers, so that from long practice her chin had learned to replace the forefinger in impressing a fact.

The date was 1689, Miss Pinck would say, and one almost expected to see a pencil screwed into her chin which would actually write the figures upon somebody's notebook.

Miss Primer was a thin, melancholy, and sandy-haired woman, who must have been very pretty before her face was netted with innumerable small lines that made her look as if birds had been scratching on it when she was asleep. Miss Primer took an extremely gloomy view of everything, and with the prospect of war in South Africa she arrived in a condition of exalted, almost ecstatic depression; she taught Art, which at Hornton House was no cure for pessimism. Miss Hossack, the Mathematical and Scientific mistress, did not have much to do with Sylvia; she was a robust woman with a loud voice who liked to be asked questions. Finally there was Miss Lee, who taught music and was the particular adoration of every girl in the school, including Sylvia. She was usually described as "ethereal," "angelic," or "divine." One girl with a taste for painting discovered that she was her ideal conception of St. Cecilia; this naturally roused the jealousy of rival adorers that would not be "copy-cats," until one of them discovered that Miss Lee, whose first name was Mary, had Annabel for a second name, the very mixture of the poetic and the intimate that was required. Sylvia belonged neither to the Cecilians nor to the Annabels, but she loved dear Miss Lee none the less deeply and passed exquisite moments in trying to play the Clementi her mistress wanted her to learn.

"What a strange girl you are, Sylvia!" Miss Lee used to say. "Anybody would think you had been taught music by an accompanist. You don't seem to have any notion of a piece, but you really play accompaniments wonderfully. It's not mere vamping."

Sylvia wondered what Miss Lee would have thought of Jimmy Monkley and the Pink Pierrots.

The afternoon that the girls arrived at Hornton House Sylvia was sure that nothing could keep her from running away that night; the prospect of facing the chattering, giggling mob that thronged the hitherto quiet hall was overwhelming. From the landing above she leaned over to watch them, unable to imagine what she would talk about to them or what they would talk about to her. It was Miss Lee who saved the situation by inviting Sylvia to meet four of the girls at tea in her room and cleverly choosing, as Sylvia realized afterward, the four leaders of the four chief sets. Who would not adore Miss Lee?

"Oh, Miss Lee, *did* you notice Gladys and Enid Worstley?" Muriel ejaculated, accentuating some of her words like the notes of an unevenly blown harmonium, and explaining to Sylvia in a sustained tremolo that these twins, whose real name was Worsley, were always called Worstley because it was impossible to decide which was more wicked. "Oh, Miss Lee, they've got the most *lovely* dresses," she went on, releasing every stop in a diapason of envy. "Simply *gorgeously* beautiful. I do think it's a shame to dress them up like that. I do, *really*."

Sylvia made a mental note to cultivate this pair not for their dresses, but for their behavior. Muriel was all very well, but those eyebrows eternally arched and those eyes eternally staring out of her head would sooner or later have most irresistibly to be given real cause for amazement.

"Their mother likes them to be prettily dressed," said Miss Lee.

"Of course she does," Gwendyr put in, primly. "She was an actress."

To hell with Gwendyr, thought Sylvia. Why shouldn't their mother have been an actress?

"Oh, but they're so conceited!" said Dorothy. "Enid Worsley *never* can pass a glass, and their frocks are most frightfully short. *Don't* you remember when they danced at last breaking-up?"

"This is getting unbearable," Sylvia thought.

"I think they're rather dears," Phyllis drawled. "They're jolly pretty, anyway."

Sylvia looked at Phyllis and decided that she was jolly pretty, too, with her golden hair and smocked linen frock of old rose; she would like to be friends with Phyllis. The moment had come, however, when she must venture all her future on a single throw. She must either shock Miss Lee and the four girls irretrievably or she must be henceforth accepted at Hornton House as herself; there must be none of these critical sessions about Sylvia Scarlett. She pondered for a minute or two the various episodes of her past. Then suddenly she told them how she had run away from school in France, arrived in England without a penny, and earned her living as an odalisque at the Exhibition. Which would she be, she asked, when she saw the girls staring at her open-mouthed now with real amazement, villain or heroine? She became a heroine, especially to Gladys and Enid, with whom she made friends that night, and who showed her in strictest secrecy two powder-puffs and a tin of Turkish cigarettes.

There were moments when Sylvia was sad, especially when war broke out and so many of the girls had photographs of brothers and cousins and friends in uniform, not to mention various generals whose ability was as yet unquestioned. She did not consider the photograph of Philip a worthy competitor of these and begged him to enlist, which hurt his feelings. Nevertheless, her adventures as an odalisque were proof in the eyes of the girls against martial relations; their only regret was that the Exhibition closed before they had time to devise a plot to visit the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels and be introduced by Sylvia to the favorites of the harem.

Miss Ashley was rather cross with Sylvia for her revelations and urged her as a personal favor to herself not to

make any more. Sylvia explained the circumstances quite frankly and promised that she would not offend again; but she pointed out that the girls were all very inquisitive about Philip and asked how she was to account for his taking her out every Sunday.

"He's your guardian, my dear. What could be more natural?"

"Then you must tell him not to blush and drop his glasses when the girls tell him I'm nearly ready. They *all* think he's in love with me."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Miss Ashley, impatiently.

"But it does matter," Sylvia contradicted. "Because even if he is going to marry me he's not the sort of lover one wants to put in a frame, now is he? That's why I bought that photograph of George Alexander which Miss Pinck made such a fuss about. I *must* have a secret sorrow. All the girls have secret sorrows this term."

Miss Ashley shook her head gravely, but Sylvia was sure she was laughing like herself.

Sylvia's chief friend was Phyllis Markham—the twins were only fourteen—and the two of them headed a society for toleration, which was designed to contend with stupid and ill-natured criticism. The society became so influential and so tolerant that the tone of the school was considered in danger, especially by Miss Primer, who lamented it much, together with the reverses in South Africa; and when after the Christmas holidays (which Sylvia spent with Miss Ashley at Bournemouth) a grave defeat coincided with the discovery that the Worsleys were signaling from their window to some boys in a house opposite, Miss Primer in a transport of woe took up the matter with the head-mistress. Miss Ashley called a conference of the most influential girls, at which Sylvia was present, and with the support of Phyllis maintained that the behavior of the twins had been much exaggerated.

"But in their nightgowns," Miss Primer wailed. "The policeman at the corner must have seen them. At such a time, too, with these deadful Boers winning everywhere. And their hair streaming over their shoulders."

"It always is," said Sylvia.

Miss Ashley rebuked her rather sharply for interrupting.

"A bull's-eye lantern. The room reeked of hot metal. I could not read the code. I took it upon myself to punish them with an extra hour's freehand to-day. But the punishment is most inadequate. I detect a disturbing influence right through the school."

Miss Ashley made a short speech in which she pointed out the responsibilities of the older girls in such matters and emphasized the vulgarity of the twins' conduct. No one wished to impute nasty motives to them, but it must be clearly understood that the girls of Hornton House could not and should not be allowed to behave like servants. She relied upon Muriel Battersby, Dorothy Hearne, Gwendyr Jones, Phyllis Markham, Georgina Roe, Helen Macdonald, and Sylvia Scarlett to prevent in future such unfortunate incidents as this that had been brought to her notice by Miss Primer, she was sure much against Miss Primer's will.

Miss Primer at these words threw up her eyes to indicate the misery she had suffered before she had been able to bring herself to the point of reporting the twins. Phyllis whispered to Sylvia that Miss Primer looked like a dying duck in a thunder-storm, a phrase which she now heard for the first time and at which she laughed aloud.

Miss Ashley paused in her discourse and fixed Sylvia with her gray eyes in pained interrogation; Miss Pinck's chin shot out; Miss Lee bit her under lip and tenderly shook her head; the other girls stared at their laps and tried to look at one another without moving their heads. Phyllis quickly explained that it was she who had made Sylvia laugh.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Ashley," she drawled.

"I'm glad to hear that you are *very* sorry," said Miss Ashley, "but Sylvia must realize when it is permissible and when it is not permissible to laugh. I'm afraid I must ask her to leave the room."

"I ought to go, too," Phyllis declared. "I made her laugh."

"I'm sure, Phyllis, that to yourself your wit seems irresistible. Pray let us have an opportunity of judging."

"Well, I said that Miss Primer looked like a dying duck in a thunder-storm."

The horrified amazement of everybody in the room expressed itself in a gasp that sounded like a ghostly, an infinitely attenuated scream of dismay. Sylvia, partly from nervousness, partly because the simile even on repetition appealed to her sense of the ridiculous, laughed aloud for a second time—laughed, indeed, with a kind of guffaw the sacrilegious echoes of which were stifled in an appalled silence.

"Sylvia Scarlett and Phyllis Markham will both leave the room immediately," said Miss Ashley. "I will speak to them later."

Outside the study of the head-mistress, Sylvia and Phyllis looked at each other like people who have jointly managed to break a mirror.

"What will she do?"

"Sylvia, I simply couldn't help it. I simply couldn't bear them all any longer."

"My dear, I know. Oh, I think it was wonderful of you."

Sylvia laughed heartily for the third time, and just at this moment the twins, who were the original cause of all the commotion, came sidling up to know what everybody had said.

"You little beasts with your bull's-eye lamps and your naughtiness," Phyllis cried. "I expect we shall all be expelled. What fun! I shall get some hunting. Oh, three cheers, I say!"

"Of course you know why Miss Primer was really in such a wax?" Gladys asked, with the eyes of an angel and the laugh of a fairy.

"No, let me tell, Gladys," Enid burst in. "You know I won the toss. We tossed up which should tell and I won. You *are* a chiseler. You see, when Miss Primer came tearing up into our room we turned the lamps onto her, and she was simply furious because she thought everybody in the street could see her in that blue-flannel wrapper."

"Which, of course, they could," Sylvia observed.

"Of course!" the twins shrieked together. "And the boys opposite clapped, and she heard them and tried to pull down the blind, and her wrapper came open and she was wearing a chest-protector!"

The interview with Miss Ashley was rather distressing, because she took from the start the altogether unexpected line of blaming Phyllis and Sylvia not for the breach of discipline, but for the wound they had inflicted

upon Miss Primer. All that had seemed fine and honest and brave and noble collapsed immediately; it was impossible after Miss Ashley's words not to feel ashamed, and both the girls offered to beg Miss Primer's pardon. Miss Ashley said no more about the incident after this, though she took rather an unfair advantage of their chastened spirits by exacting a promise that they would in common with the rest of the school leaders set their faces against the encouragement of such behavior as that of the twins last night.

The news from South Africa was so bad that Miss Primer's luxury of grief could scarcely have been heightened by Phyllis's and Sylvia's rudeness; however, she wept a few tears, patted their hands, and forgave them. A few days afterward she was granted the boon of another woe, which she shared with the whole school, in the news of Miss Lee's approaching marriage. Any wedding would have upset Miss Primer, but in this case the sorrow was rendered three times as poignant by the fact that Miss Lee was going to marry a soldier under orders for the front. This romantic accessory could not fail to thrill the girls, though it was not enough to compensate for the loss of their beloved Miss Lee. Rivalries between the Cecílias and Annabels were forever finished; several girls had been learning Beethoven's Pathetic Sonata and the amount of expression put into it would, they hoped, show Miss Lee the depth of their emotion when for the last time these frail fingers so lightly corrected their touch, when for the last time that delicate pencil inscribed her directions upon their music.

"Of course the school will *never* be the same without her," said Muriel.

"I shall write home and ask if I can't take up Italian instead of music," said Dorothy.

"Fancy playing duets with any one but Miss Lee," said Gwendyr. "The very idea makes me shudder."

"Perhaps we shall have a music-master now," said Gladys.

Whereupon everybody told her she was a heartless thing. Poor Gladys, who really loved Miss Lee as much as anybody, retired to her room and cried for the rest of the evening, until she was consoled by Enid, who pointed out that now she *must* use her powder-puff.

For Sylvia the idea of Miss Lee's departure and marriage was desolating; it was an abrupt rending of half the ties that bound her to Hornton House. Phyllis, Miss Ashley, and the twins were all that really remained, and Phyllis was always threatening to persuade her people to take her away when the weather was tolerably warm, so deeply did she resent the loss of hunting. It was curious how much more Phyllis meant to her than Philip, so much, indeed, that she had never confided in her that she was going to marry Philip. How absurd that two names so nearly alike could be in the one case so beautiful, in the other so ugly. Yet she was still very fond of Philip and she still enjoyed going out with him on Sundays, even though it meant being deprived of pleasant times with Phyllis. She had warned Philip that she might get too fond of school, and he had smiled in that superior way of his. Ought she to marry him at all? He had been so kind to her that if she refused to marry him she would have to run away, for she could not continue under an obligation. Why did people want to marry? Why must she marry? Worst of all, why must Miss Lee marry? But these were questions that not even Miss Hossack would be able to answer. Ah, if it had only been Miss Hossack who had been going to marry. Sylvia began to make up a rhyme about Miss Hossack marrying a Cossack and going for her honeymoon to the Trossachs, where Helen Macdonald lived.

All the girls had subscribed to buy Miss Lee a dressing-case, which they presented to her one evening after tea with a kind of dismal beneficence, as if they were laying a wreath upon her tomb. Next morning she went away by an early train to the north of England, and after lunch every girl retired with the secret sorrow that now had more than fashion to commend it. Sylvia's sorrow was an aching regret that she had not told Miss Lee more about herself and her life and Philip; now it was too late. She met the twins wandering disconsolately enlaced along the corridor outside her room.

"Oh, Sylvia, dearest Sylvia!" they moaned. "We've lost our duet with Miss Lee's fingering."

"I'll help you to look for it."

"Oh, but we lost it on purpose, because we didn't like it, and the next day Miss Lee said she was going to be married."

Sylvia asked where they lost it.

"Oh, we put it in an envelope and posted it to the Bishop of London."

Sylvia suggested they should write to the Bishop and explain the circumstances in which the duet was sent to him; he would no doubt return it.

"Oh no," said the twins, mournfully. "We never put a stamp on and we wrote inside, 'A token of esteem and regard from two sinners who you confirmed.' How can we ask for it back?"

Sylvia embraced the twins, and the three of them wandered in the sad and wintry garden until it was time for afternoon school.

The next day happened to be Sunday, and Philip came as usual to take Sylvia out. He had sent her the evening before an overcoat trimmed with gray squirrel, which, if it had not arrived after Miss Lee's departure, would have been so much more joyfully welcomed. Philip asked her why she was so sad and if the coat did not please her. She told him about its coming after Miss Lee had gone, and, as usual, he had a lot to say:

"You strange child, how quickly you have adopted the outlook and manners of the English school-girl. One would say that you had never been anything else. How absurd I was to be afraid that you were a wild bird whom I had caught too late. I'm quite positive now that you'll be happy with me down in Hampshire. I'm sorry you've lost Miss Lee. A charming woman, I thought, and very cultivated. Miss Ashley will miss her greatly, but she herself will be glad to get away from music-teaching. It must be an atrocious existence."

Here was a new point of view altogether. Could it really be possible that those delicious hours with Miss Lee were a penance to the mistress? Sylvia looked at Philip angrily, for she found it unforgivable in him to destroy her illusions like this. He did not observe her expression and continued his monologue:

"Really atrocious. Exercises! Scales! Other people's chilblains! A creaking piano-stool! What a purgatory! And all to teach a number of young women to inflict an objectionable noise upon their friends and relations."

"Thanks," Sylvia broke in. "You won't catch me playing again."

"I'm not talking about you," Philip said. "You have temperament. You're different from the ordinary school-girl." He took her arm affectionately. "You're you, dear Sylvia."

"And yours," she added, sullenly. "I thought you said just now that I was just like any other English school-girl"

and that you were so happy about it."

"I said you'd wonderfully adopted the outlook," Philip corrected. "Not quite the same thing."

"Oh, well, take your horrible coat, because I don't want it," Sylvia exclaimed, and, rapidly unbuttoning her new overcoat, she flung it on the pavement at his feet.

Nobody was in sight at the moment, so Philip did not get angry.

"Now don't tell me it's illogical to throw away only the coat and not undress myself completely. I know quite well that everything I've got on is yours."

"Oh no, it's not," Philip said, gently. "It's yours."

"But you paid for everything."

"No, you paid yourself," he insisted.

"How?"

"By being Sylvia. Come along, don't trample on your poor coat. There's a most detestable wind blowing."

He picked up the offending overcoat and helped her into it again with so much sympathy half humorous, half grave in his demeanor that she could not help being sorry for her outburst.

Nevertheless, the fact of her complete dependence upon Philip for everything, even before marriage, was always an oppression to Sylvia's mind, which was increased by the continual reminders of her loneliness that intercourse with other girls forced upon her. They, when they should marry, should be married from a background; the lovers, when they came for them, would have to fight for their love by breaking down the barriers of old associations, old friendships, and old affections; in a word, they would have to win the brides. What was her own background? Nothing but a panorama of streets which offered no opposition to Philip's choice except in so far as it was an ugly background for a possession of his own and therefore fit to be destroyed. It was all very well for Philip to tell her that she was herself and that he loved her accordingly. If that were true, why was he taking so much trouble to turn her into something different? Other girls at Hornton House, when they married, would not begin with ugly backgrounds to be obliterated; their pasts would merge beautifully with the pasts of their husbands; they were not being transformed by Miss Pinck and Miss Primer; they were merely being supplied by them with value for their parents' money. It was a visit to Phyllis Markham's home in Leicestershire during the Easter holidays that had branded with the iron of jealousy these facts upon her meditation. Phyllis used to lament that she had no brothers; and Sylvia used to wonder what she would have said if she had been like herself, without mother, without father, without brothers, without sisters, without relations, without friends, without letters, without photographs, with nothing in the whole world between herself and the shifting panorama from which she had been snatched but the love of a timid man inspired by an unusual encounter in Brompton Cemetery. This visit to Phyllis Markham was the doom upon their friendship; however sweet, however sympathetic, however loyal Phyllis might be, she must ultimately despise her friend's past; every word Sylvia listened to during those Easter holidays seemed to cry out the certain fulfilment of this conjecture.

"I expect I'm too sensitive," Sylvia said to herself. "I expect I really am common, because apparently common people are always looking out for slights. I don't look out for them now, but if I were to tell Phyllis all about myself, I'm sure I should begin to look out for them. No, I'll just be friends with her up to a point, for so long as I stay at Hornton House; then we'll separate forever. I'm really an absolute fraud. I'm just as much of a fraud now as when I was dressed up as a boy. I'm not real in this life. I haven't been real since I came down to breakfast with Miss Ashley that first morning. I'm simply a very good impostor. I must inherit the talent from father. Another reason against telling Phyllis about myself is that, if I do, I shall become her property. Miss Ashley knows all about me, but I'm not her property, because it's part of her profession to be told secrets. Phyllis would love me more than ever, so long as she was the only person that owned the secret, but if anybody else ever knew, even if it were only Philip, she would be jealous and she would have to make a secret of it with some one else. Then she would be ashamed of herself and would begin to hate and despise me in self-defense. No, I must never tell any of the girls."

Apart from these morbid fits, which were not very frequent, Sylvia enjoyed her stay at Markham Grange. In a way it encouraged the idea of marrying Philip; for the country life appealed to her not as to a cockney by the strangeness of its inhabitants and the mere quantity of grass in sight, but more deeply with those old ineffable longings of Hampstead.

At the end of the summer term the twins invited Sylvia to stay with them in Hertfordshire. She refused at first, because she felt that she could not bear the idea of being jealously disturbed by a second home. The twins were inconsolable at her refusal and sent a telegram to their mother, who had already written one charming letter of invitation, and who now wrote another in which she told Sylvia of her children's bitter disappointment and begged her to come. Miss Ashley, also, was anxious that Sylvia should go, and told her frankly that it seemed an excellent chance to think over seriously her marriage with Philip in the autumn. Philip, now that the date of her final decision was drawing near, wished her to remain with Miss Ashley in London. His opposition was enough to make Sylvia insist upon going; so, when at the end of July the school was swept by a tornado of relations and friends, Sylvia was swept away with the twins to Hertfordshire, and Philip was left to wait till the end of September to know whether she would marry him or not in October.

The Worsleys' home at Arbour End made an altogether different impression upon Sylvia from Markham Grange. She divined in some way that the background here was not immemorial, but that the Worsleys had created it themselves. And a perfect background it was—a very comfortable red brick house with a garden full of flowers, an orchard loaded with fruit, fields promenaded by neat cows, pigsties inhabited by clean pigs, a shining dog-cart and a shining horse, all put together with the satisfying completeness of a picture-puzzle. Mr. Worsley was a handsome man, tall and fair with a boyish face and a quantity of clothes; Mrs. Worsley was slim and fair, with a rose-leaf complexion and as many clothes as her husband. The twins were even naughtier and more charming than they were at Hornton House; there was a small brother called Hercules, aged six, who was as charming as his sisters and surpassed them in wickedness. The maids were trim and tolerant; the gardener was never grumpy; Hercules's governess disapproved of holiday tasks; the dogs wagged their tails at the least sound.

"I love these people," Sylvia said to herself, when she was undressing on the first night of her stay. "I love them, I love them. I feel at home—at home—at home!" She leaped into bed and hugged the pillow in a triumph of good-fellowship.

At Arbour End Sylvia banished the future and gave herself to the present. One seemed to have nothing to do but to amuse oneself then, and it was so easy to amuse oneself that one never grew tired of doing so. As the twins pointed out, their father was so much nicer than any other father, because whatever was suggested he always enjoyed. If it was a question of learning golf, Mr. Worsley took the keenest interest in teaching it. When Gladys drove a ball through the drawing-room window, no one was more delighted than Mr. Worsley himself; he infected everybody with his pleasure, so that the gardener beamed at the notion of going to fetch the glazier from the village, and the glazier beamed when he mended the window, and the maids beamed while they watched him at work, and the dogs sat down in a loose semicircle, thumping the lawn with appreciative tails. The next day, when Hercules, who, standing solemnly apart from the rest, had observed all that happened, threw a large stone through the mended window, there was the same scene of pleasure slightly intensified.

Mrs. Worsley flitted through the house, making every room she entered more beautiful and more gay for her presence. She had only one regret, which was that the twins were getting so big, and this not as with other mothers because it made her feel old, but because she would no more see their black legs and their tumbled hair. Sylvia once asked her how she could bear to let them go to school, and Mrs. Worsley's eyes filled with tears.

"I had to send them to school," she whispered, sadly. "Because they *would* fall in love with the village boys and they were getting Hertfordshire accents. Perhaps you've noticed that I myself speak with a slight cockney accent. Do you understand, dear?"

The August days fled past and in the last week came a letter from Miss Ashley.

MURREN, August 26, 1900.

MY DEAR SYLVIA,—I shall be back from Switzerland by September 3d, and I shall be delighted to see you at Hornton House again. Philip nearly followed me here in order to talk about you, but I declined his company. I want you to think very seriously about your future, as no doubt you have been doing all this month. If you have the least hesitation about marrying Philip, let me advise you not to do it. I shall be glad to offer you a place at Hornton House, not as a schoolmistress, but as a kind of director of the girls' leisure time. I have grown very fond of you during this year and have admired the way in which you settled down here more than I can express. We will talk this over more fully when we meet, but I want you to know that, if you feel you ought not to marry, you have a certain amount of security for the future while you are deciding what you will ultimately do. Give my love to the twins. I shall be glad to see you again.

Your affectionate  
CAROLINE ASHLEY.

The effect of Miss Ashley's letter was the exact contrary of what she had probably intended; it made Sylvia feel that she was not bound to marry Philip, and, from the moment she was not bound, that she was willing, even anxious, to marry him. The aspects of his character which she had criticized to herself vanished and left only the first impression of him, when she was absolutely free and was finding his company such a relief from the Exhibition. Another result of the letter was that by removing the shame of dependence and by providing an alternative it opened a way to discussion, for which Sylvia fixed upon Mrs. Worsley, divining that she certainly would look at her case unprejudiced by anything but her own experience.

Sylvia never pretended to herself that she would be at all influenced by advice. Listening to advice from Mrs. Worsley would be like looking into a shop-window with money in one's pocket, but with no intention of entering the shop to make a purchase; listening to her advice before Miss Ashley's offer would have been like looking at a shop-window without a penny in the world, a luxury of fancy to which Sylvia had never given way. So at the first opportunity Sylvia talked to Mrs. Worsley about Philip, going back for her opinion of him and feeling toward him to those first days together, and thereby giving her listener an impression that she liked him a very great deal, which was true, as Sylvia assured herself, yet not without some misgivings about her presentation of the state of affairs.

"He sounds most fascinating," said Mrs. Worsley. "Of course Lennie was never at all clever. I don't think he ever read a book in his life. When I met him first I was acting in burlesque, and I had to make up my mind between him and my profession; I'm so glad I chose him. But at first I was rather miserable. His parents were still alive, and though they were very kind to me, I was always an intruder, and of course Lennie was dependent on them, for he was much too stupid an old darling to earn his own living. He really has nothing but his niceness. Then his parents died and, being an only son, Lennie had all the money. We lived for a time in his father's house, but it became impossible. We had my poor old mother down to stay with us, and the neighbors called, as if she were a curiosity. When she didn't appear at tea, you could feel they were staying on, hoping against hope to get a glimpse of her. I expect I was sensitive and rather silly, but I was miserable. And then Lennie, who is not clever, but so nice that it always leads him to do exactly the right thing, went away suddenly and bought this house, where life has been one long dream of happiness. You've seen how utterly self-contained we are. Nobody comes to visit us very much, because when we first came here we used to hide when people called. And then the twins have always been such a joy—oh, dear, I wish they would never grow up; but there's still Hercules, and you never know, there might be another baby. Oh, my dear Sylvia, I'm sure you ought to get married. And you say his parents are dead?"

"But he has a sister."

"Oh, a sister doesn't matter. And it doesn't matter his being clever and fond of books, because you're fond of books yourself. The twins tell me you've read everything in the world and that there's nothing you don't know. I'm sure you'd soon get tired of Hornton House—oh, yes, I strongly advise you to get married."

When Sylvia got back to London the memory of Arbour End rested in her thoughts like a pleasant dream of the night that one ponders in a summer dawn. She assured Miss Ashley that she was longing to marry Philip; and when she seemed to express in her reception of the announcement a kind of puzzled approval, Sylvia spoke with real enthusiasm of her marriage. Miss Ashley never knew that the real inspiration of such enthusiasm was Arbour End and not at all Philip himself. As for Sylvia, because she would by no means admit even to herself that she had taken Mrs. Worsley's advice, she passed over the advice and remarked only the signs of happiness at Arbour End.

Sylvia and Philip were married at a registry-office early in October. The honeymoon was spent in the Italian lakes, where Philip denounced the theatrical scenery, but crowned Sylvia with vine-leaves and wrote Latin poetry to her, which he translated aloud in the evenings as well as the mosquitoes would let him.



## CHAPTER VII

GREEN LANES lay midway between the market town of Galton and the large village of Newton Candover. It is a small, tumble-down hamlet remote from any highroad, the confluence of four deserted by-ways leading to other hamlets upon the wooded downland of which Green Lanes was the highest point. Hare Hall, the family mansion of the Iredales, was quite two miles away in the direction of Newton Candover and was let for a long term of years to a rich stockbroker. Philip himself lived at The Old Farm, an Elizabethan farm-house which he had filled with books. The only other "gentleman" in Green Lanes was the vicar, Mr. Dorward, with whom Philip had quarreled. The squire as lay rector drew a yearly revenue of £300, but he refused to allow the living more than £90 until the vicar gave up his ritualistic fads, to which, though he never went inside the church, he strongly objected.

Sylvia's first quarrel with Philip was over the vicar, whom she met through her puppy's wandering into his cottage while he was at tea and refusing to come out. She might never have visited him again if Philip had not objected, for he was very shy and eccentric; but after two more visits to annoy Philip, she began to like Mr. Dorward, and her friendship with him became a standing source of irritation to her husband and a pleasure to herself which she declined to give up. Her second quarrel with Philip was over his sister Gertrude, who came down for a visit soon after they got back from Como. Gertrude, having until her brother's marriage always lived at The Old Farm, could not refrain from making Sylvia very much aware of this; her conversation was one long, supercilious narrative of what she used to do at Green Lanes, with which were mingled fears for what might be done there in the future. Philip was quite ready to admit that his sister could be very irritating, but he thought Sylvia's demand for her complete exclusion from The Old Farm for at least a year was unreasonable.

"Well, if she comes, I shall go," Sylvia said, sullenly.

"My dear child, do remember that you're married and that you can't go and come as you like," Philip answered. "However, I quite see your point of view about poor Gertrude and I quite agree with you that for a time it will be wiser to keep ourselves rather strictly to ourselves."

Why could he not have said that at first, Sylvia thought. She would have been so quickly generous if he had, but the preface about her being married had spoiled his concession. He was a curious creature, this husband of hers. When they were alone he would encourage her to be as she used to be; he would laugh with her, show the keenest interest in what she was reading, search for a morning to find some book that would please her, listen with delight to her stories of Jimmy Monkley or of her father or of Blanche, and be always, in fact, the sympathetic friend, never obtruding himself, as lover or monitor, two aspects of him equally repugnant to Sylvia. Yet when there was the least likelihood not alone of a third person's presence, but even of a third person's hearing any roundabout gossip of her real self, Philip would shrivel her up with interminable corrections, and what was far worse, try to sweeten the process by what she considered fatuous demonstrations of affection. For a time there was no great tension between them, because Sylvia's adventurous spirit was occupied by her passion for knowledge; she felt vaguely that at any time the moment might arrive when mere knowledge without experience would not be enough; at present the freedom of Philip's library was adventure enough. He was most eager to assist her progress, and almost reckless in the way he spurred her into every liberty of thought, maintaining the stupidity of all conventional beliefs—moral, religious, or political. He warned her that the expression of such opinions, or, still worse, action under the influence of them, would be for her or for any one else in the present state of society quite impossible; Sylvia used to think at the time that it was only herself as his wife whom he wished to keep in check, and resented his reasons accordingly; afterward looking back to this period she came to the conclusion that Philip was literally a theorist, and that his fierce denunciations of all conventional opinions could never in any circumstances have gone further than quarreling with the vicar and getting married in a registry-office. Once when she attacked him for his cowardice he retorted by citing his marriage with her, and immediately afterward apologized for what he characterized as "caddishness."

"If you had married me and been content to let me remain myself," Sylvia said, "you might have used that argument. But you showed you were frightened of what you'd done when you sent me to Hornton House."

"My dear child, I wanted you to go there for your own comfort, not for mine. After all, it was only like reading a book; it gave you a certain amount of academic theory that you could prove or disprove by experience."

"A devil of a lot of experience I get here," Sylvia exclaimed.

"You're still only seventeen," Philip answered. "The time will come."

"It will come," Sylvia murmured, darkly.

"You're not threatening to run away from me already?" Philip asked, with a smile.

"I might do anything," she owned. "I might poison you."

Philip laughed heartily at this; just then Mr. Dorward passed over the village green, which gave him an opportunity to rail at his cassock.

"It's ridiculous for a man to go about dressed up like that. Of course, nobody attends his church. I can't think why my father gave him the living. He's a ritualist, and his manners are abominable."

"But he looks like a Roman Emperor," said Sylvia.

Philip spluttered with indignation. "Oh, he's Roman enough, my dear child; but an Emperor! Which Emperor?"

"I'm not sure which it is, but I think it's Nero."

"Yes, I see what you mean," Philip assented, after a pause. "You're amazingly observant. Yes, there is that kind of mixture of sensual strength and fineness about his face. But it's not surprising. The line between degeneracy and the 'twopence colored' type of religion is not very clearly drawn."

It was after this conversation that, in searching for a picture of Nero's head to compare with Mr. Dorward's, Sylvia came across the Satyricon of Petronius in a French translation. She read it through without skipping a word, applied it to the test of recognition, and decided that she found more satisfactorily than in any book she had yet read a distorting mirror of her life from the time she left France until she met Philip, a mirror, however, that never distorted so wildly as to preclude recognition. Having made this discovery, she announced it to him, who applauded her sense of humor and of literature, but begged her to keep it to herself; people might get a wrong idea of her; he knew what she meant and appreciated the reflection, but it was a book that, generally speaking, no woman would read, still less talk about, and least of all claim kinship with. It was of course an immortal work of art, humorous,

witty, fantastic.

"And true," Sylvia added.

"And no doubt true to its period and its place, which was southern Italy in the time of Nero."

"And true to southern England in the time of Victoria," Sylvia insisted. "I don't mean that it's exactly the same," she went on, striving almost painfully to express her thoughts. "The same, though. I *feel* it's true. I don't *know* it's true. Oh, can't you understand?"

"I fancy you're trying to voice your esthetic consciousness of great art that, however time may change its accessories, remains inherently changeless. Realism in fact as opposed to what is wrongly called realism. Lots of critics, Sylvia, have tried to define what is worrying you, and lots of long words have been enlisted on their behalf. A better and more ancient word for realism was 'poetry'; but the word has been debased by the versifiers who call themselves poets just as painters call themselves artists—both are titles that only posterity can award. Great art is something that is made and that lives in itself; like that stuff, radium, which was discovered the year before last, it eternally gives out energy without consuming itself. Radium, however, does not solve the riddle of life, and until we solve that, great art will remain undefinable. Which reminds me of a mistake that so-called believers make. I've often heard Christians maintain the truth of Christianity, because it is still alive. What nonsense! The words of Christ are still alive, because Christ Himself was a great poet, and therefore expressed humanity as perhaps no one else ever expressed humanity before. But the lying romantic, the bad poet, in fact, who tickles the vain and credulous mob with miracles and theogonies, expresses nothing. It is a proof of nothing but the vitality of great art that the words of Christ can exist and can continue to affect humanity notwithstanding the mountebank behavior attributed to Him, out of which priests have manufactured a religion. It is equally surprising that Cervantes could hold his own against the romances of chivalry he tried to kill. He may have killed one mode of expression, but he did not prevent *East Lynne* from being written; he yet endures because Don Quixote, whom he made, has life. By the way, you never got on with Don Quixote, did you?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"I think it's a failure on your part, dear Sylvia."

"He is so stupid," she said.

"But he realized how stupid he was before he died."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I can't help my bad taste, as you call it. He annoys me."

"You think the Yanguseian carriers dealt with him in the proper way?"

"I don't remember them."

"They beat him."

"I think I could beat a person who annoyed me very much," Sylvia said. "I don't mean with sticks, of course, but with my behavior."

"Is that another warning?" Philip asked.

"Perhaps."

"Anyway, you think Petronius is good?"

She nodded her head emphatically.

"Come, you shall give a judgment on Aristophanes. I commend him to you in the same series of French translations."

"I think Lysistrata is simply splendid," Sylvia said, a week or so later. "And I like the Thesmos-something and the Eck-something."

"I thought you might," Philip laughed. "But don't quote from them when my millionaire tenant comes to tea."

"Don't be always harping upon the dangers of my conversation," she exhorted.

"Mayn't I even tease you?" Philip asked, in mock humility.

"I don't mind being teased, but it isn't teasing. It's serious."

"Your sense of humor plays you tricks sometimes," he said.

"Oh, don't talk about my sense of humor like that. My sense of humor isn't a watch that you can take out and tap and regulate and wind up and shake your head over. I hate people who talk about a sense of humor as you do. Are you so sure you have one yourself?"

"Perhaps I haven't," Philip agreed, but by the way in which he spoke Sylvia knew that he would maintain he had a sense of humor, and that the rest of humanity had none if it combined to contradict him. "I always distrust people who are too confidently the possessors of one," he added.

"You don't understand in the least what I mean," Sylvia cried out, in exasperation. "You couldn't distrust anybody else's sense of humor if you had one yourself."

"That's what I said," Philip pointed out, in an aggrieved voice.

"Don't go on; you'll make me scream," she adjured him. "I won't talk about a sense of humor, because if there is such a thing it obviously can't be talked about."

Lest Philip should pursue the argument, she left him and went for a long muddy walk by herself half-way to Galton. She had never before walked beyond the village of Medworth, but she was still in such a state of nervous exasperation that she continued down the hill beyond it without noticing how far it was taking her. The country on either side of the road ascended in uncultivated fields toward dense oak woods. In many of these fields were habitations with grandiose names, mostly built of corrugated iron. Sylvia thought at first that she was approaching the outskirts of Galton and pressed on to explore the town, the name of which was familiar from the rickety tradesmen's carts that jogged through Green Lanes. There was no sign of a town, however, and after walking about two miles through a landscape that recalled the pictures she had seen of primitive settlements in the Far West, she began to feel tired and turned round upon her tracks, wishing she had not come quite so far. Suddenly a rustic gate that was almost buried in the unclipped hazel hedge on one side of the road was flung open, and an elderly lady with a hooked nose and fierce bright eyes, dressed in what looked at a first glance like a pair of soiled lace window-curtains, asked Sylvia with some abruptness if she had met a turkey going in her direction. Sylvia shook her head, and the elderly lady (Sylvia would have called her an old lady from her wrinkled countenance, had she not been so

astonishingly vivacious in her movements) called in a high harsh voice:

"Emmie! There's a girl here coming from Galton way, and *she* hasn't seen Major Kettlewell."

In the distance a female voice answered, shrilly, "Perhaps he's crossed over to the Pluepotts'!"

Sylvia explained that she had misunderstood the first inquiry, but that nobody had passed her since she turned back five minutes ago.

"We call the turkey Major Kettlewell because he looks like Major Kettlewell, but Major Kettlewell himself lives over there."

The elderly lady indicated the other side of the road with a vague gesture, and went on:

"Where can that dratted bird have got to? Major! Major! Major! Chuch—chick—chilly—chilly—chuck—chuck," she called.

Sylvia hoped that the real major lived far enough away to be out of hearing.

"Never keep a turkey," the elderly lady went on, addressing Sylvia. "We didn't kill it for Christmas, because we'd grown fond of it, even though he is like that old ruffian of a major. And ever since he's gone on the wander. It's the springtime coming, I suppose."

The elderly lady's companion had by this time reached the gate, and Sylvia saw that she was considerably younger, but with the same hall-mark of old-maidishness.

"Don't worry any more about the bird, Adelaide," said the new-comer. "It's tea-time. Depend upon it, he's crossed over to the Pluepotts'. This time I really will wring his neck."

Sylvia prepared to move along, but the first lady asked her where she was going, and, when she heard Green Lanes, exclaimed:

"Gemini! That's beyond Medworth, isn't it? You'd better come in and have a cup of tea with us. I'm Miss Horne, and my friend here is Miss Hobart."

Sunny Bank, as this particular tin house was named, not altogether inappropriately, although it happened to be on the less sunny side of the road, was built half-way up a steepish slope of very rough ground from which enough flints had been extracted to pave a zigzag of ascending paths, and to vary the contour of the slope with a miniature mountain range of unused material without apparently smoothing the areas of proposed cultivation.

"These paths are something dreadful, Emmie," said Miss Horne, as the three of them scrambled up through the garden. "Never mind, we'll get the roller out of the hedge when Mr. Pluepott comes in on Wednesday. Miss Hobart nearly got carried away by the roller yesterday," she explained to Sylvia.

A trellised porch outside the bungalow—such apparently was the correct name for these habitations—afforded a view of the opposite slope, which was sprinkled with bungalows surrounded like Sunny Bank by heaps of stones; there were also one or two more pretentious buildings of red brick and one or two stony gardens without a dwelling-place as yet.

"I suppose you're wondering why the name over the door isn't the same as the one on the gate? Mr. Pluepott is always going to take it out, but he never remembers to bring the paint. It's the name the man from whom we bought it gave the bungalow," said Miss Hobart, crossly. Sylvia read in gothic characters over the door Floral Nook, and agreed with the two ladies that Sunny Bank was much more suitable.

"For whatever else it may be, it certainly isn't damp," Miss Horne declared. "But, dear me, talking of names, you haven't told us yours."

Sylvia felt shy. It was actually the first time she had been called upon to announce herself since she was married. The two ladies exclaimed on hearing she was Mrs. Iredale, and Sylvia felt that there was a kind of impropriety in her being married, when Miss Horne and Miss Hobart, who were so very much older than she, were still spinsters.

The four small rooms of which the bungalow consisted were lined with varnished match-boarding; everything was tied up with brightly colored bows of silk, and most of the pictures were draped with small curtains; the bungalow was full of knickknacks and shivery furniture, but not full enough to satisfy the owners' passion for prettiness, so that wherever there was a little space on the walls silk bows had been nailed about like political favors. Sylvia thought it would have been simpler to tie a wide sash of pink silk round the house and call it The Chocolate Box. Tea, though even the spoons were tied up with silk, was a varied and satisfying meal. The conversation of the two ladies was remarkably entertaining when it touched upon their neighbors, and when twilight warned Sylvia that she must hurry away she was sorry to leave them. While she was making her farewells there was a loud tap at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of a small bullet-headed man with quick black eyes.

"I've brought back your turkey, Miss Horne."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Pluepott. There you are, Emmie. You were right."

At this moment the bird began to flap its wings as violently as its position head downward would allow; nor, not being a horse, did it pay any attention to Mr. Pluepott's repeated shouts of "Woa! Woa back, will you!"

"I think you'd better let him flap outside, Mr. Pluepott," Miss Hobart advised.

Sylvia thought so too when she looked at the floor.

"Shall I wring its neck now or would you rather I waited till I come in on Wednesday?"

"Oh, I think we'll wait, thank you, Mr. Pluepott," Miss Horne said. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind shutting him up in the coop. He does wander so. Are you going into Galton?"

Mr. Pluepott replied, as he confined Major Kettlewell to his barracks, that, on the contrary, he was driving up to Medworth to see about some beehives for sale there, whereupon Miss Horne and Miss Hobart asked if he would mind taking Mrs. Iredale that far upon her way.

A few minutes later Sylvia, on a very splintery seat, was jolting along beside Mr. Pluepott toward Medworth.

"Rum lot of people hereabouts," he said, by way of opening the conversation, "Some of the rummest people it's ever been my luck to meet. I came here because my wife had to leave the Midlands. Chest was bad. I used to be a cobbler at Bedford. Since I've been here I've become everything—carpenter, painter, decorator, gardener, mason, bee expert, poultry-keeper, blacksmith, livery-stables, furniture-remover, house agent, common carrier, bricklayer, dairyman, horse-breaker. The only thing I don't do now is make boots. Funny thing, and you won't believe it, but last

week I had to buy myself the first pair of boots I ever bought since I was a lad of fifteen. Oh, well, I like the latest better than the last, as I jokingly told my missus the other night. It made her laugh," said Mr. Pluepott, looking at Sylvia rather anxiously; she managed to laugh too, and he seemed relieved.

"I often make jokes for my missus. She's apt to get very melancholy with her chest. But, as I was saying, the folk round here they beat the band. It just shows what advertisement will do."

Sylvia asked why.

"Well, when I first came here, and I was one of the three first, I came because I read an advertisement in the paper: 'Land for the Million in lots from a quarter of an acre.' Some fellow had bought an old farm that was no use to nobody and had the idea of splitting it up into lots. Originally this was the Oak Farm Estate and belonged to St. Mary's College, Oxford. Now we call it Oaktown—the residents, that is—but when we applied the other day to the Galton Rural District Council, so as we could have the name properly recognized, went in we did with the major, half a dozen of us, as smart as a funeral, one of the wise men of Gotham, which is what I jokingly calls Galton nowadays, said he thought Tintown would be a better name. The major got rare and angry, but his teeth slipped just as he was giving it 'em hot and strong, which is a trick they have. He nearly swallowed 'em last November, when he was taking the chair at a Conservative meeting, in an argument with a Radical about the war. They had to lead him outside and pat his back. It's a pity the old ladies can't get on with him. They fell out over blackberrying in his copse last Michaelmas. Well, the fact is the major's a bit close, and I think he meant to sell the blackberries. He's put up a notice now 'Beware of Dangerous Explosives,' though there's nothing more dangerous than a broken air-gun in the whole house. Miss Horne was very bitter about it; oh, very bitter she was. Said she always knew the major was a guy, and he only wanted to stuff himself with gunpowder to give the boys a rare set out on the Fifth."

"How did Miss Horne and Miss Hobart come here?" Sylvia asked.

"Advertisement. They lived somewhere near London, I believe; came into a bit of money, I've heard, and thought they'd settle in the country. I give them a morning a week on Wednesdays. The man they bought it off had been a tax-collector somewhere in the West Indies. He swindled them properly, but they were sorry for him because he had a floating kidney—floating in alcohol, I should think, by the amount he drank. But they won't hear a word against him even now. He's living in Galton and they send him cabbages every week, which he gives to his rabbits when he's sober and throws at his housekeeper when he's drunk. Sunny Bank! I'm glad it's not my Bank. As I jokingly said to my missus, I should soon be stony-broke. Ah, well, there's all sorts here and that's a fact," Mr. Pluepott continued, with a pensive flick at his pony. "That man over there, for instance." He pointed with his whip through the gathering darkness to a particularly small tin cottage. "He used to play the trombone in a theater till he played his inside out; now he thinks he's going to make a fortune growing early tomatoes for Covent Garden market. You get him with a pencil in his hand of an evening and you'd think about borrowing money from him next year; but when you see him next morning trying to cover a five-by-four packing-case with a broken sash-light, you'd be more afraid of his trying to borrow from you."

With such conversation did Mr. Pluepott beguile the way to Medworth; and when he heard that Sylvia intended to walk in the dusk to Green Lanes he insisted on driving her the extra two miles.

"The hives won't fly away," he said, cheerfully, "and I like to make a good job of a thing. Well, now you've found your way to Oaktown, I hope you'll visit us again. Mrs. Pluepott will be very glad to see you drop in for a cup of tea any day, and if you've got any comical reading-matter, she'd be glad to borrow from you; for her chest does make her very melancholy, and, being accustomed to having me always about the house when I was cobbling, she doesn't seem to get used to being alone. Only the other day she said if she'd known I was going to turn into a Buffalo Bill she'd rather have stayed in Bedford. 'Land for the Millions!' she said, 'I reckon you'd call it Land for the Million, if you had to sweep the house clean of the mud you bring into it.' Well, good night to you. Very glad I was able to oblige, I'm sure."

Philip was relieved when Sylvia got back. She had never been out for so long before, and she teased him about the running away, that he had evidently imagined. She felt in a good humor after her expedition, and was glad to be back in this dignified and ancient house with its books and lamplight and not a silken bow anywhere to be seen.

"So you've been down to that abomination of tin houses? It's an absolute blot on the countryside. I don't recommend too close an acquaintanceship. I'm told it's inhabited by an appalling set of rascals. Poor Melville, who owns the land all 'round, says he can't keep a hare."

Sylvia said the people seemed rather amusing, and was not at all inclined to accept Philip's condemnation of them; he surely did not suggest that Miss Horne and Miss Hobart, for instance, were poachers?

"My dear child, people who come and live in a place like the Oak Farm Estate—Oaktown, as they have the impudence to call it—are there for no good. They've either done something discreditable in town or they hope to do something discreditable in the country. Oh yes, I've heard all about our neighbors. There's a ridiculous fellow who calls himself a major—I believe he used to be in the volunteers—and can't understand why he's not made a magistrate. I'm told he's the little tin god of Tintown. No, no, I prefer even your friendship with our vicar. Don't be cross with me, Sylvia, for laughing at your new friends, but you mustn't take them too seriously. I shall have finished the text I'm writing this month, and we'll go up to London for a bit. Shall we? I'm afraid you're getting dull down here."

The spring wore away, but the text showed no signs of being finished. Sylvia suggested that she should invite Gladys and Enid Worsley to stay with her, but Philip begged her to postpone the invitation while he was working, and thought in any case it would be better to have them down in summer. Sylvia went to Oaktown once or twice, but said nothing about it to Philip, because from a sort of charitableness she did not want him to diminish himself further in her eyes by airing his prejudices with the complacency that seemed to increase all the time they stayed in the country.

One day at the end of April Miss Horne and Miss Hobart announced they had bought a governess-car and a pony, built a stable, and intended to celebrate their first drive by calling on Sylvia at Green Lanes. Mr. Pluepott had promised, even if it should not be on a Wednesday, to superintend the first expedition and gave his opinion of the boy whom it was proposed to employ as coachman. The boy in question, whom Mr. Pluepott called Jehuselah, whether from an attempt to combine a satirical expression of his driving and his age, or too slight acquaintance with Biblical personalities, was uncertain, was known as Ernie to Miss Horne and Miss Hobart when he was quick and good, but

as Ernest when he was slow and bad; his real name all the time was Herbert.

"Good heavens!" Philip ejaculated, when he beheld the governess-car from his window. "Who on earth is this?"

"Friends of mine," said Sylvia. "Miss Horne and Miss Hobart. I told you about them."

"But they're getting out," Philip gasped, in horror. "They're coming here."

"I know," Sylvia said. "I hope there's plenty for tea. They always give me the most enormous teas." And without waiting for any more of Philip's protests she hurried down-stairs and out into the road to welcome the two ladies. They were both of them dressed in pigeon's-throat silk under more lace even than usual, and arrived in a state of enthusiasm over Ernie's driving and thankfulness for the company of Mr. Pluepott, who was also extremely pleased with the whole turn-out.

"A baby in arms couldn't have handled that pony more carefully," he declared, looking at Ernie with as much pride as if he had begotten him.

"We're so looking forward to meeting Mr. Iredale," said Miss Horne.

"We hear he's a great scholar," said Miss Hobart.

Sylvia took them into the dining-room, where she was glad to see that a gigantic tea had been prepared—a match even for the most profuse of Sunny Bank's.

Then she went up-stairs to fetch Philip, who flatly refused to come down.

"You must come," Sylvia urged. "I'll never forgive you if you don't."

"My dearest Sylvia, I really cannot entertain the eccentricities of Tintown here. You invited them. You must look after them. I'm busy."

"Are you coming?" Sylvia asked, biting her lips.

"No, I really can't. It's absurd. I don't want this kind of people here. Besides, I must work."

"You sha'n't work," Sylvia cried, in a fury, and she swept all his books and papers on the floor.

"I certainly sha'n't come now," he said, in the prim voice that was so maddening.

"Did you mean to come before I upset your books?"

"Yes, I probably should have come," he answered.

"All right. I'm so sorry. I'll pick everything up," and she plunged down on the floor. "There you are," she said when everything was put back in its place. "Now will you come?"

"No, my dear. I told you I wouldn't after you upset my things."

"Philip," she cried, her eyes bright with rage, "you're making me begin to hate you sometimes."

Then she left him and went back to her guests, to whom she explained that her husband had a headache and was lying down. The ladies were disappointed, but consoled themselves by recommending a number of remedies which Miss Horne insisted that Sylvia should write down. When tea was finished, Miss Hobart said that their first visit to Green Lanes had been most enjoyable and that there was only one thing they would like to do before going home, which would be to visit the church. Sylvia jumped at an excuse for not showing them over the house, and they set out immediately through the garden to walk to the little church that stood in a graveyard grass-grown like the green lanes of the hamlet whose dead were buried there. The sun was westering, and in the golden air they lowered their voices for a thrush that was singing his vespers upon a moldering wooden cross.

"Nobody ever comes here," Sylvia said. "Hardly anybody comes to church ever. The people don't like Mr. Dorward's services. They say he can't be heard."

Suddenly the vicar himself appeared, and seemed greatly pleased to see Sylvia and her visitors; she felt a little guilty, because, though she was great friends with Mr. Dorward, she had never been inside the church, nor had he ever hinted he would like her to come. It would seem so unkind for her to come like this for the first time with strangers, as if the church which she knew he deeply loved was nothing but a tea-time entertainment. There was no trace of reproachfulness in his manner, as he showed Miss Horne and Miss Hobart the vestments and a little image of the Virgin in peach-blow glaze that he moved caressingly into the sunlight, as a child might fondle reverently a favorite doll. He spoke of his plans for restoration and unrolled the design of a famous architect, adding with a smile for Sylvia that the lay rector disapproved of it thoroughly. They left him arranging the candlesticks on the altar, a half-pathetic, half-humorous figure that seemed to be playing a solitary game.

"And you say nobody goes to his church!" Miss Horne exclaimed. "But he's most polite and charming."

"Scarcely anybody goes," Sylvia said.

"Emmie," said Miss Horne, standing upright and flashing forth an eagle's glance. "*We* will attend his service."

"That is a very good idea of yours, Adelaide," Miss Hobart replied.

Then they got into the governess-car with much determination, and with friendly waves of the hand to Sylvia set out back to Oaktown.

When Miss Horne and Miss Hobart had left, Sylvia went up-stairs to have it out with Philip. At this rate there would very soon be a crisis in their married life. She was a little disconcerted by his getting up the moment she entered his room and coming to meet her with an apology.

"Dearest Sylvia, you can call me what you will; I shall deserve the worst. I can't understand my behavior this afternoon. I think I must have been working so hard that my nerves are hopelessly jangled. I very nearly followed you into the churchyard to make myself most humbly pleasant, but I saw Dorward go 'round almost immediately afterward, and I could not have met him in the mood I was in without being unpardonably rude."

He waited for her with an arm stretched out in reconciliation, but Sylvia hesitated.

"It's all very well to hurt my feelings like that because you happened to be feeling in a bad temper," she said, "and then think you've only got to make a pleasant little speech to put everything right again. Besides, it isn't only to-day; it's day after day since we've been married. I feel like Gulliver when he was being tied up by the Lilliputians. I can't find any one big rope that's destroying my freedom, but somehow or other my freedom is being destroyed. Did you marry me casually, as people buy birds, to put me in a cage?"

"My dear, I married you because I loved you. You know I fought against the idea of marrying you for a long time, but I loved you too much."

"Are you afraid of my loyalty?" she demanded. "Do you think I go to Oaktown to be made love to?"

"Sylvia!" he protested.

"I go there because I'm bored, bored, endlessly, hopelessly, paralyzingly bored. It's my own fault. I never ought to have married you. I can't think why I did, but at least it wasn't for any mercenary reason. You're not to believe that. Philip, I do like you, but why will you always upset me?"

He thought for a moment and asked her presently what greater freedom she wanted, what kind of freedom.

"That's it," she went on. "I told you I couldn't find any one big rope that bound me. There isn't a single thread I can't snap with perfect ease, but it's the multitude of insignificant little threads that almost choke me."

"You told me you thought you would like to live in the country," he reminded her.

"I do, but, Philip, do remember that I really am still a child. I've got a deep voice and I can talk like a professor, but I'm still a hopeless kid. I oughtn't to have to tell you this. You ought to see it for yourself if you love me."

"Dearest Sylvia, I'm always telling you how young you are, and there's nothing that annoys you more," he said.

"Oh, Philip, Philip, you really are pathetic! When did you ever meet a young person who liked to have her youth called attention to? You're so remote from beginning to understand how to manage me, and I'm still manageable. Very soon I sha'n't be, though; and there'll be such a dismal smash-up."

"If you'd only explain exactly," he began; but she interrupted him at once.

"My dear man, if I explain and you take notes and consult them for your future behavior to me, do you think that's going to please me? It can all be said in two words. I'm human. For the love of God be human yourself."

"Look here, let's go away for a spell," said Philip, brightly.

"The cat's miaowing. Let's open the door. No, seriously, I think I should like to go away from here for a while."

"By yourself?" he asked, in a frightened voice.

"Oh no, not by myself. I'm perfectly content with you. Only don't suggest the Italian lakes and try to revive the early sweets of our eight months of married life. Don't let's have a sentimental rebuilding. It will be so much more practical to build up something quite new."

Philip really seemed to have been shaken by this conversation. Sylvia knew he had not finished his text, but he put everything aside in order not to keep her waiting; and before May was half-way through they had reached the island of Sirene. Here they stayed two months in a crumbling pension upon the cliff's edge until Sylvia was sun-dried without and within; she was enthralled by the evidences of imperial Rome, and her only regret was that she did not meet an eccentric Englishman who was reputed to have found, when digging a cistern, at least one of the lost books of Elephantias, which he read in olive-groves by the light of the moon. However, she met several other eccentrics of different nationalities and was pleased to find that Philip's humanism was, with Sirene as a background, strong enough to lend him an appearance of humanity. They planned, like all other visitors to Sirene, to build a big villa there; they listened like all other visitors to the Italian and foreign inhabitants' depreciation of every villa but the one in which they lived, either because they liked it or because they wanted to let it or because they wished new-comers to fall into snares laid for themselves when they were new-comers.

At last they tore themselves from Sirenean dreams and schemes, chiefly because Sylvia had accepted an invitation to stay at Arbour End. They lingered for a while at Naples on the way home, where Sylvia looked about her with Petronian eyes, so much so, indeed, that a guide mistook what was merely academic curiosity for something more practical. It cost Philip fifty liras and nearly all the Italian he knew to get rid of the pertinacious and ingenious fellow.

Arbour End had not changed at all in a year. Sylvia, when she thought of Green Lanes, laughed a little bitterly at herself (but not so bitterly as she would have laughed before the benevolent sunshine of Sirene) for ever supposing that she and Philip could create anything like it. Gladys and Enid, though they were now fifteen, had not yet lengthened their frocks; their mother could not yet bring herself to contemplate the disappearance of those slim black legs.

"But we shall have to next term," Gladys said, "because Miss Ashley's written home about them."

"And that stuck-up thing Gwendyr Jones said they were positively disgusting," Enid went on.

"Yes," added Gladys, "and I told her they weren't half as disgusting as her ankles. And they aren't, are they, Sylvia?"

"Some of the girls call her marrow-bones," said Enid.

Sylvia would have preferred to avoid any intimate talks with Mrs. Worsley, but it was scarcely to be expected that she would succeed, and one night, looking ridiculously young with her fair hair hanging down her back, she came to Sylvia's bedroom, and sitting down at the end of her bed, began:

"Well, are you glad you got married?"

At any rate, Sylvia thought, she had the tact not to ask if she was glad she had taken her advice.

"I'm not so sorry as I was," Sylvia told her.

"Ah, didn't I warn you against the first year? You'll see that I was right."

"But I was not sorry in the way you prophesied. I've never had any bothers with the country. Philip's sister was rather a bore, always wondering about his clothes for the year after next; but we made a treaty, and she's been excluded from The Old Farm—wait a bit, only till next October. By Jove! I say, the treaty'll have to be renewed. I don't believe even memories of Sirene would enable me to deal with Gertrude this winter. No, what worries me most in marriage is not other people, but our two selves. I hate writing Sylvia Iredale instead of Sylvia Scarlett. Quite unreasonable of me, but most worries are unreasonable. I don't want to be owned. I'm a book to Philip; he bought me for my binding and never intended to read me, even if he could. I don't mean to say I was beautiful, but I was what an American girl at Hornton House used to call cunning; the pattern was unusual, and he couldn't resist it. But now that he's bought me, he expects me to stay quite happily on a shelf in a glass case; one day he may perhaps try to read me, but at present, so long as I'm taken out and dusted—our holiday at Sirene was a dusting—he thinks that's enough. But the worm that flies in the heart of the storm has got in, Victoria, and is making a much more unusual pattern across my inside—I say, I think it's about time to drop this metaphor, don't you?"

"I don't think I quite understand all you're saying," said Victoria Worsley.

Sylvia brought her hand from beneath the bedclothes and took her friend's.

"Does it matter?"

"Oh, but I like to understand what people are saying," Mrs. Worsley insisted. "That's why we never go abroad for our holidays. But, Sylvia, about being owned, which is where I stopped understanding. Lennie doesn't own me."

"No, you own *him*, but I don't own Philip."

"I expect you will, my dear, after you've been married a little longer."

"You think I shall acquire him in monthly instalments. I should find at the end the cost too much in repairs, like Fred Organ."

"Who's he?"

"Hube's brother, the cabman. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, of course, how silly of me! I thought it might be an Italian you met at Sirene. You've made me feel quite sad, Sylvia. I always want everybody to be happy," she sighed. "I am happy—perfectly happy—in spite of being married."

"Nobody's happy because of being married," Sylvia enunciated, rather sententiously.

"What nonsense you talk, and you're only just eighteen!"

"That's why I talk nonsense," Sylvia said, "but all the same it's very true nonsense. You and Lennie couldn't have ever been anything but happy."

"Darling Lennie, I think it must be because he's so stupid. I wonder if he's smoking in bed. He always does if I leave him to go and talk to anybody. Good night, dear."

Sylvia returned to her book, wondering more than ever how she could have supposed a year ago that she could follow Victoria Worsley along the pathway of her simple and happy life.

The whole family from Arbour End came to London for the ten days before term began, and Sylvia stayed with them at a hotel. Gladys and Enid had to get their new frocks, and certain gaps in Hercules's education had to be filled up, such as visiting the Zoo and the Tower of London and the Great Wheel at Earl's Court. Sylvia and the twins searched in vain for the Hall of a Thousand and One Marvels, but they found Mabel selling Turkish Delight by herself at a small stall in another part of the Exhibition. Sylvia thought the best way of showing her penitence for the heartless way she had treated her was to buy as much Turkish Delight as could possibly be carried away, since she probably received a percentage on the takings. Mabel seemed to bear no resentment, but she was rather shy, because she mistook the twins for Sylvia's sisters-in-law and therefore avoided the only topic upon which she could talk freely, which was men. They left the florid and accommodating creature with a callow youth who was leaning familiarly across the counter and smacking with a cane his banana-colored boots; then they ate as much Turkish Delight as they could and divided the rest among some ducks and the Kaffirs in the kraal.

Sylvia also visited Hornton House and explained to Miss Ashley why she had demanded the banishment of Gertrude from Green Lanes.

"Poor Gertrude, she was very much upset," Miss Ashley said.

Sylvia, softened by the memories of a so happy year that her old school evoked, made up her mind not to carry on the war against Gertrude. She felt, too, a greater charity toward Philip, who, after all, had been the cause of her being given that so happy year, and she went back to Hampshire with the firm intention of encouraging this new mood that the last four months had created in her. Philip was waiting on the platform and was so glad to see her again that he drove even more absent-mindedly than usual, until she took the reins from him and whipped up the horse with a quite positive anticipation of home.

Sylvia learned from Philip that the visit of Miss Horne and Miss Hobart had influenced other lives than their own, for it seemed that Miss Horne's announcement of their attendance in future at Mr. Dorward's empty church had been fully carried out. Not a Sunday passed but that they drove up in the governess-car to Mass, so Philip said with a wry face for the word; what was more, they stayed to lunch with the vicar, presided at the Sunday-school, and attended the evening service, which had been put forward half an hour to suit their supper.

"They absolutely rule Green Lanes ecclesiastically," Philip said. "And some of the mercenary bumpkins and boobies 'round here have taken to going to church for what they can get out of the two old ladies. I'm glad to say, however, that the farmers and their families haven't come 'round yet."

Sylvia said she was glad for Mr. Dorward's sake, and she wondered why Philip made such a fuss about the form of a service in the reality of which, whatever way it was presented, he had no belief.

"I suppose you're right," he agreed. "Perhaps what I'm really afraid of is that our fanatical vicar will really convert the parish to his childish religion. Upon my soul, I believe Miss Horne has her eye upon me. I know she's been holding forth upon my iniquitous position as lay rector, and these confounded Radicals will snatch hold of anything to create prejudice against landowners."

"Why don't you make friends with Mr. Dorward?" Sylvia suggested. "You could surely put aside your religious differences and talk about the classics."

"I dare say I'm bigoted in my own way," Philip answered. "But I can't stand a priest, just as some people can't stand cats or snakes. It's a positively physical repulsion that I can't get over. No, I'm afraid I must leave Dorward to you, Sylvia. I don't think there's much danger of your falling a victim to man-millinery. It'll take all your strength of mind, however, to resist the malice of these two old witches, and I wager you'll be excommunicated from the society of Tintown in next to no time."

Sylvia found that Philip had by no means magnified the activities of Miss Horne and Miss Hobart, and for the first time on a Sunday morning at Green Lanes a thin black stream of worshipers flowed past the windows of The Old Farm after service. It was more than curiosity could bear; without saying a word to anybody Sylvia attended the evening service herself. The church was very small, and her entrance would have attracted much more attention than it did if Ernie, who was holding the thurible for Mr. Dorward to put in the incense, had not given at that moment a mighty sneeze, scattering incense and charcoal upon the altar steps and frightening the woman at the harmonium into a violent discord, from which the choir was rescued by Miss Horne's unmoved and harsh soprano that positively twisted back the craning necks of the congregation into their accustomed apathy. Sylvia wondered whether fear, conversion, or extra wages had induced Ernie to put on that romantic costume which gave him the

appearance of a rustic table covered with a tea-cloth, as he waited while the priest tried to evoke a few threads of smoke from the ruin caused by his sneeze. Sylvia was so much occupied in watching Ernie that she did not notice the rest of the congregation had sat down. Mr. Dorward must have seen her, for he had thrown off the heavy vestment he was wearing and was advancing apparently to say how d'ye do. No, he seemed to think better of it, and had turned aside to read from a large book, but what he read neither Sylvia nor the congregation had any idea. She decided that all this standing up and kneeling and sitting down again was too confusing for a novice, and during the rest of the service she remained seated, which was at once the most comfortable and the least conspicuous attitude. Sylvia had intended to slip out before the service was over, as she did not want Miss Horne and Miss Hobart to exult over her imaginary conversion, but the finale came sooner than she expected in a fierce hymnal outburst during which Mr. Dorward hurriedly divested himself and reached the vestianel. Miss Horne had scarcely thumped the last beat on the choir-boy's head in front of her, the echoes of the last amen had scarcely died away, before the female sexton, an old woman called Cassandra Batt, was turning out the oil-lamps and the little congregation had gathered 'round the vicar in the west door to hear Miss Horne's estimate of its behavior. There was no chance for Sylvia to escape.

"Ernest," said Miss Horne, "what did you sneeze for during the Magnificat? Father Dorward never got through with censuring the altar, you bad boy."

"The stoff got all up me nose," said Ernie. "Oi couldn't help meself."

"Next time you want to sneeze," said Miss Hobart, kindly, "press your top lip below the nose, and you'll keep it back."

"I got too much to do," Ernie muttered, "and too much to think on."

"Jane Frost," said Miss Horne, quickly turning the direction of her attack, "you must practise all this week. Suppose Father Dorward gets a new organ? You wouldn't like not to be allowed to play on it. Some of your notes to-night weren't like a musical instrument at all. The Nunc Dimittis was more like water running out of a bath. 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,' are the words, not in pieces, which was what it sounded like the way you played it."

Miss Jane Frost, a daughter of the woman who kept the Green Lanes shop, blushed as deeply as her anemia would let her, and promised she would do better next week.

"That's right, Jane," said Miss Hobart, whose part seemed to be the consolation of Miss Horne's victims. "I dare say the pedal is a bit obstinate."

"Oh, it's turble obstinate," said Cassandra, the sexton, who, having extinguished all the lamps, now elbowed her way through the clustered congregation, a lighted taper in her hand. "I jumped on un once or twice this morning to make um a bit easier like, but a groaned at me like a wicked old toad. It's ile that a wants."

The congregation, on which a good deal of grease was being scattered by Cassandra's taper in her excitement, hastened to support her diagnosis.

"Oh yass, yass, 'tis ile that a wants."

"I will bring a bottle of oil up during the week," Miss Horne proclaimed. "Good night, everybody, and remember to be punctual next Sunday."

The congregation murmured its good night, and Sylvia, to whom it probably owed such a speedy dismissal, was warmly greeted by Miss Horne.

"So glad you've come, Mrs. Iredale, though I wish you'd brought the lay rector. Lay rector, indeed! Sakes alive, what will they invent next?"

"Yes, we're so glad you've come, dear," Miss Hobart added. Mr. Dorward came up in his funny quick way. When they were all walking across the churchyard, he whispered to Sylvia, in his funny quick voice:

"Church fowls, church fowls, you know! Mustn't discourage them. Pious fowls! Godly fowls! An example for the parish. Better attendance lately."

Then he caught up the two ladies and helped them into the vehicle, wishing them a pleasant drive and promising a nearly full moon shortly, after Medworth, very much as if the moon was really made of cheese and would be eaten for supper by Miss Horne and Miss Hobart.

When Sylvia got back to The Old Farm she amused Philip so much with her account of the service that he forgot to be angry with her for doing what at first he maintained put him in a false position.

All that autumn and winter Miss Horne and Miss Hobart wrestled with Satan for the souls of the hamlet; incidentally they wrestled with him for Sylvia's soul, but she scratched the event by ceasing to appear at all in church, and intercourse between them became less frequent; the friends of Miss Horne and Miss Hobart had to be all or nothing, and not the least divergence of belief or opinion, manners or policy, was tolerated by these two bigoted old ladies. The congregation, notwithstanding their efforts, remained stationary, much to Philip's satisfaction.

"The truth is," he said, "that the measure of their power is the pocket. Every scamp in the parish who thinks it will pay him to go to church is going to church. The others don't go at all or walk over to Medworth."

Her contemplation of the progress of religion in Green Lanes, which, however much she affected to laugh at it, could not help interesting Sylvia on account of her eccentric friend the vicar, was temporarily interrupted by a visit from Gertrude Iredale. Remembering what Miss Ashley had told her, Sylvia had insisted upon Philip's asking his sister to stay, and he had obviously been touched by her suggestion. Gertrude perhaps had also taken some advice from Miss Ashley, for she was certainly less inclined to wonder what her brother would do about his clothes the year after next. She could not, however, altogether keep to herself her criticism of the housewifery at The Old Farm, a simple business in Sylvia's eyes, which consisted of letting the cook do exactly as she liked, with what she decided were very satisfactory results.

"But it's so extravagant," Gertrude objected.

"Well, Philip doesn't grumble. We can afford to pay a little extra every week to have the house comfortably run."

"But the principle is so bad," Gertrude insisted.

"Oh, principle," said Sylvia in an airy way, which must have been galling to her sister-in-law. "I don't believe in principles. Principles are only excuses for what we want to think or what we want to do."



"Don't you believe in abstract morality?" Gertrude asked, taking off her glasses and gazing with weak and earnest eyes at Sylvia.

"I don't believe in anything abstract," Sylvia replied.

"How strange!" the other murmured. "Goodness me! if I didn't believe in abstract morality I don't know where I should be—or what I should do."

Sylvia regarded the potential sinner with amused curiosity.

"Do tell me what you might do," she begged. "Would you live with a man without marrying him?"

"Please don't be coarse," said Gertrude. "I don't like it."

"I could put it much more coarsely," Sylvia said, with a laugh. "Would you—"

"Sylvia!" Gertrude whistled through her teeth in an agony of apprehensive modesty. "I entreat you not to continue."

"There you are," said Sylvia. "That shows what rubbish all your scruples are. You're shocked at what you thought I was going to say. Therefore you ought to be shocked at yourself. As a matter of fact, I was going to ask if you would marry a man without loving him."

"If I were to marry," Gertrude said, primly, "I should certainly want to love my husband."

"Yes, but what do you understand by love? Do you mean by love the emotion that makes people go mad to possess—"

Gertrude rose from her chair. "Sylvia, the whole conversation is becoming extremely unpleasant. I must ask you either to stop or let me go out of the room."

"You needn't be afraid of any personal revelations," Sylvia assured her. "I've never been in love that way. I only wanted to find out if you had been and ask you about it."

"Never," said Gertrude, decidedly. "I've certainly never been in love like that, and I hope I never shall."

"I think you're quite safe. And I'm beginning to think I'm quite safe, too," Sylvia added. "However, if you won't discuss abstract morality in an abstract way, you mustn't expect me to do so, and the problem of housekeeping returns to the domain of practical morality, where principles don't count."

Sylvia decided after this conversation to accept Gertrude as a joke, and she ceased to be irritated by her any longer, though her sister-in-law stayed from Christmas till the end of February. In one way her presence was of positive utility, because Philip, who was very much on the lookout for criticism of his married life, was careful not to find fault with Sylvia while she remained at Green Lanes; it also acted as a stimulus to Sylvia herself, who used her like a grindstone on which to sharpen her wits. Another advantage from Gertrude's visit was that Philip was able to finish his text, thanks to her industrious docketing and indexing and generally fussing about in his study. Therefore, when Sylvia proposed that the twins should spend their Easter holidays at The Old Farm, he had no objection to offer.

The prospect of the twins' visit kept Sylvia at the peak of pleasurable expectation throughout the month of March, and when at last, on a budding morn in early April, she drove through sky-enchanted puddles to meet them, she sang for the first time in months the raggle-taggle gipsies, and reached the railway station fully half an hour before the train was due. Nobody got out but the twins; yet they laughed and talked so much, the three of them, in the first triumph of meeting, that several passengers thought the wayside station must be more important than it was, and asked anxiously if this was Galton.

Gladys and Enid had grown a good deal in six months, and now with their lengthened frocks and tied-back hair they looked perhaps older than sixteen. Their faces, however, had not grown longer with their frocks; they were as full of spirits as ever, and Sylvia found that while they still charmed her as of old with that quality of demanding to be loved for the sheer grace of their youth, they were now capable of giving her the intimate friendship she so greatly desired.

"You darlings," she cried. "You're like champagne-cup in two beautiful crystal glasses with rose-leaves floating about on top."

The twins, who with all that zest in their own beauty which is the prerogative of a youth unhampered by parental jealousy, frankly loved to be admired; Sylvia's admiration never made them self-conscious, because it seemed a natural expression of affection. Their attitude toward Philip was entirely free from any conventional respect; as Sylvia's husband he was candidate for all the love they had for her, but when they found that Philip treated them as Sylvia's toys they withheld the honor of election and began to criticize him. When he seemed shocked at their criticism they began to tease him, explaining to Sylvia that he had obviously never been teased in his life. Philip, for his part, found them precocious and vain, which annoyed Sylvia and led to her seeking diversions and entertainment for the twins' holidays outside The Old Farm. As a matter of fact, she had no need to search far, because they both took a great fancy to Mr. Dorward, who turned out to have an altogether unusual gift for drawing nonsensical pictures, which were almost as funny as his own behavior, that behavior which irritated so many more people than it amused.

The twins teased Mr. Dorward a good deal about his love-affair with Miss Horne and Miss Hobart, and though this teasing may only have coincided with Mr. Dorward's previous conviction that the two ladies were managing him and his parish rather too much for his dignity and certainly too much for his independence, there was no doubt that the quarrel between them was prepared during the time that Gladys and Enid were staying at Green Lanes; indeed, Sylvia thought she could name the actual afternoon.

Sylvia's intercourse with Miss Horne and Miss Hobart was still friendly enough to necessitate an early visit to Sunny Bank to present the twins. The two ladies were very fond of what they called "young people," and at first they were enraptured by Gladys and Enid, particularly when they played some absurd school-girl's trick upon Major Kettlewell. Sylvia, too, had by her tales of the island of Sirene inspired them with a longing to go there; they liked nothing better than to make her describe the various houses and villas that were for sale or to let, in every one of which in turn Miss Horne and Miss Hobart saw themselves installed.

On the particular afternoon from which Sylvia dated the preparation of the quarrel, they were all at tea with Mr. Dorward in his cottage. The conversation came round to Sirene, and Sylvia told how she had always thought that the vicar resembled a Roman Emperor. Was it Nero? He was perhaps flattered by the comparison, notwithstanding the

ladies' loud exclamations of dissent, and was anxious to test the likeness from a volume of engraved heads which he produced. With Gladys sitting on one arm of his chair and Enid on the other, the pages were turned over slowly to allow time for a careful examination of each head, which involved a good deal of attention to Mr. Dorward's own. In the end Nero was ruled out and a more obscure Emperor was hailed as his prototype, after which the twins rushed out into the garden and gathered strands of ivy to encircle his imperial brow; Miss Horne and Miss Hobart, who had taken no part in the discussion, left immediately after the coronation, and though it was a perfectly fine evening, they announced, as they got into their vehicle, that it looked very much like rain.

Next Sunday the ladies came to church as usual, but Mr. Dorward kept them waiting half an hour for lunch while he showed the twins his ornaments and vestments, which they looked at solemnly as a penance for having spent most of the service with their handkerchiefs in their mouths. What Miss Horne and Miss Hobart said at lunch Sylvia never found out, but they drove away before Sunday-school and never came back to Green Lanes, either on that Sunday or on any Sunday afterward.

All that Mr. Dorward would say about the incident was:

"Church fowls! Chaste fowls! Chaste and holy, but tiresome. The vicar mustn't be managed. Doesn't like it. Gets frightened. Felt remote at lunch. That was all. Would keep on talking. Got bored and more remote. Vicar got so remote that he had to finish his lunch under the table."

"Oh no, you didn't really?" cried the twins, in an ecstasy of pleasure. "You didn't really get under the table, Mr. Dorward?"

"Of course, of course, of course. Vicar always speaks the truth. Delicious lunch."

Sylvia had to tell Philip about this absurd incident, but he would only say that the man was evidently a buffoon in private as well as in public.

"But, Philip, don't you think it's a glorious picture? We laughed till we were tired."

"Gladys and Enid laugh very easily," he answered. "Personally I see nothing funny in a man, especially a clergyman, behaving like a clown."

"Oh, Philip, you're impossible!" Sylvia cried.

"Thanks," he said, dryly. "I've noticed that ever since the arrival of our young guests you've found more to complain of in my personality even than formerly."

"Young guests!" Sylvia echoed, scornfully. "Who would think, to hear you talk now, that you married a child? Really you're incomprehensible."

"Impossible! Incomprehensible! In fact thoroughly negative," Philip said.

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders and left him.

The twins went back to school at the beginning of May, and Sylvia, who missed them very much, had to fall back on Mr. Dorward to remind her of their jolly company. Their intercourse, which the twins had established upon a certain plane, continued now upon the same plane. Life had to be regarded as Alice saw it in Wonderland or through the looking-glass. Sylvia remembered with irony that it was Philip who first introduced her to those two books; she decided he had only liked them because it was correct to like them. Mr. Dorward, however, actually was somebody in that fantastic world, not like anybody Alice met there, but another inhabitant whom she just happened to miss.

To whom else but Mr. Dorward could have occurred that ludicrous adventure when he was staying with a brother priest in a remote part of Devonshire?

"I always heard he was a little odd. However, we had dinner together in the kitchen. He only dined in the drawing-room on Thursdays."

"When did he dine in the dining-room?" Sylvia asked.

"Never. There wasn't a dining-room. There were a lot of rooms that were going to be the dining-room, but it was never decided which. And that cast a gloom over the whole house. My host behaved in the most evangelical way at dinner and only once threw the salad at the cook. After dinner we sat comfortably before the kitchen fire and discussed the Mozarabic rite and why yellow was no longer a liturgical color for confessors. At half past eleven my host suggested it was time to go to bed. He showed me up-stairs to a very nice bedroom and said good night, advising me to lock the door. I locked the door, undressed, said my prayers, and got into bed. I was just dozing off when I heard a loud tap at the door. I felt rather frightened. Rather frightened I felt. But I went to the door and opened it. Outside in the passage was my host in his nightgown with a candlestick.

"'Past twelve o'clock,' he shouted. 'Time to change beds!' and before I knew where I was he had rushed past me and shut me out into the passage."

"Did you change beds?"

"There wasn't another bed in the house. I had to sleep in one of the rooms that might one day be a dining-room, and the next morning a rural dean arrived, which drove me away."

Gradually from underneath what Philip called "a mass of affectation," but what Sylvia divined as an armor assumed against the unsympathetic majority by a shy, sensitive, and lovable spirit, there emerged for her the reality of Mr. Dorward. She began to comprehend his faith, which was as simple as a little child's; she began to realize also that he was impelled to guard what he held to be most holy against the jeers of unbelievers by diverting toward his own eccentricity the world's mockery. He was a man of the deepest humility who considered himself incapable of proselytizing. Sylvia used to put before him sometimes the point of view of the outside world and try to show how he could avoid criticism and gain adherents. He used always to reply that if God had intended him to be a missionary he would not have been placed in this lowly parish, that here he was unable to do much harm, and that any who found faith in his church must find it through the grace of God, since it was impossible to suppose they would ever find it through his own ministrations. He insisted that people who stayed away from church because he read the service badly or burned too many candles or wore vestments were only ostentatious worshipers who looked upon the church as wax-works must regard Madame Tussaud's. He explained that he had been driven to discourage the work of Miss Horne and Miss Hobart because he had detected in himself a tendency toward spiritual pride in the growth of a congregation that did not belong either to him or to God; if he had tolerated Miss Horne's methods for a time it was because he feared to oppose the Divine intention. However, as soon as he found that he was thinking complacently of a congregation of twenty-four, nearly every one of which was a pensioner of Miss Horne, he realized that they were

instruments of the devil, particularly when at lunch they began to suggest....

"What?" Sylvia asked, when he paused.

"The only thing to do was to finish my lunch under the table," he snapped; nor would he be persuaded to discuss the quarrel further.

Sylvia, who felt that the poor ladies had, after all, been treated in rather a cavalier fashion and was reproaching herself for having deserted them, went down to Oaktown shortly after this to call at Sunny Bank. They received her with freezing coldness, particularly Miss Hobart, whose eyes under lowering eyelids were sullen with hate. She said much less than Miss Horne, who walked in and out of the shivery furniture, fanning herself in her agitation and declaiming against Mr. Dorward at the top of her voice.

"And your little friends?" Miss Hobart put in with a smile that was not a smile. "We thought them just a little badly brought up."

"You liked them very much at first," Sylvia said.

"Yes, one often likes people at first."

And as Sylvia looked at her she realized that Miss Hobart was not nearly so old as she had thought her, perhaps not yet fifty. Still, at fifty one had no right to be jealous.

"In fact," said Sylvia, brutally, "you liked them very much till you thought Mr. Dorward liked them too."

Miss Hobart's eyelids almost closed over her eyes and her thin lips disappeared. Miss Horne stopped in her restless parade and, pointing with her fan to the door, bade Sylvia be gone and never come to Sunny Bank again.

"The old witch," thought Sylvia, when she was toiling up the hill to Medworth in the midsummer heat. "I believe he's right and that she is the devil."

She did not tell Philip about her quarrel, because she knew that he would have reminded her one by one of every occasion he had taken to warn Sylvia against being friendly with any inhabitant of Tintown. A week or two later, Philip announced with an air of satisfaction that a van of Treacherites had arrived in Newton Candover and might be expected at Green Lanes next Sunday.

Sylvia asked what on earth Treacherites were, and he explained that they were the followers of a certain Mr. John Treacher, who regarded himself as chosen by God to purify the Church of England of popish abuses.

"A dreadful little cad, I believe," he added. "But it will be fun to see what they make of Dorward. It's a pity the old ladies have been kept away by the heat, or we might have a free fight."

Sylvia warned Mr. Dorward of the Treacherites' advent, and he seemed rather worried by the news; she had a notion he was afraid of them, which made her impatient, as she frankly told him.

"Not many of us. Not many of us," said Mr. Dorward. "Hope they won't try to break up the church."

The Treacherites arrived on Saturday evening and addressed a meeting by The Old Farm, which fetched Philip out into the road with threats of having them put in jail for creating a disturbance.

"If you want to annoy people, go to church to-morrow and annoy the vicar," he said, grimly.

Sylvia, who had heard Philip's last remark, turned on him in a rage: "What a mean and cowardly thing to say when you know Mr. Dorward can't defend himself as you can. Let them come to church to-morrow and annoy the vicar. You see what they'll get."

"Come, come, Sylvia," Philip said, with an attempt at pacification and evidently ashamed of himself. "Let these Christians fight it out among themselves. It's nothing to do with us, as long as they don't...."

"Thank you, it's everything to do with me," she said. He looked at her in surprise.

Next morning Sylvia took up her position in the front of the church and threatened with her eye the larger congregation that had gathered in the hope of a row as fiercely as Miss Horne and Miss Hobart might have done. The Treacherites were two young men with pimply faces who swaggered into church and talked to one another loudly before the service began, commenting upon the ornaments with cockney facetiousness. Cassandra Batt came over to Sylvia and whispered hoarsely in her ear that she was afraid there would be trouble, because some of the village lads had looked in for a bit of fun. The service was carried through with constant interruptions, and Sylvia felt her heart beating faster and faster with suppressed rage. When it was over, the congregation dispersed into the churchyard, where the yokels hung about waiting for the vicar to come out. As he appeared in the west door a loud boing was set up, and one of the Treacherites shouted:

"Follow me, loyal members of the Protestant Established Church, and destroy the idols of the Pope." Whereupon the iconoclast tried to push past Mr. Dorward, who was fumbling in his vague way with the lock of the door. He turned white with rage and, seizing the Treacherite by the scruff of his neck, he flung him head over heels across two mounds. At this the yokels began to boo more vehemently, but Mr. Dorward managed to shut the door and lock it, after which he walked across to the discomfited Treacherite and, holding out his hand, apologized for his violence. The yokels, who mistook generosity for weakness, began to throw stones at the vicar, one of which cut his face. Sylvia, who had been standing motionless in a trance of fury, was roused by the blood to action. With a bound she sprang at the first Treacherite and pushed him into a half-dug grave; then turning swiftly, she advanced against his companion with upraised stick.

The youth just had time to gasp a notification to the surrounding witnesses that Sylvia assaulted him first, before he ran; but the yokels, seeing that the squire's wife was on the side of the parson, and fearing for the renewal of their leases and the repairs to their cottages, turned round upon the Treacherites and dragged them off toward the village pond.

"Come on, Cassandra," Sylvia cried. "Let's go and break up the van."

Cassandra seized her pickax and followed Sylvia, who with hair streaming over her shoulders and elation in her aspect charged past The Old Farm just when Philip was coming out of the gate.

"Come on, Philip!" she cried. "Come on and help me break up their damned van."

By this time the attack had brought most of the village out of doors. Dogs were barking; geese and ducks were flapping in all directions; Sylvia kept turning round to urge the sexton, whose progress was hampered by a petticoat's slipping down, not to bother about her clothes, but to come on. A grandnephew of the old woman picked up the crimson garment and, as he pursued his grandaunt to restore it to her, waved it in the air like a standard. The

yokels, who saw the squire watching from his gate, assumed his complete approval of what was passing (as a matter of fact he was petrified with dismay), and paid no attention to the vicar's efforts to rescue the Treacherites from their doom in the fast-nearing pond. The van of the iconoclasts was named Ridley: "By God's grace we have to-day lit such a candle as will never be put out" was printed on one side. On the other was inscribed, "John Treacher's Poor Preachers. Supported by Voluntary Contributions." By the time Sylvia, Cassandra, and the rest had finished with the van it was neither legible without nor habitable within.

Naturally there was a violent quarrel between Sylvia and Philip over her behavior, a quarrel that was not mended by her being summoned later on by the outraged Treacherites, together with Mr. Dorward and several yokels.

"You've made a fool of me from one end of the county to the other," Philip told her. "Understand once and for all that I don't intend to put up with this sort of thing."

"It was your fault," she replied. "You began it by egging on these brutes to attack Mr. Dorward. You could easily have averted any trouble if you'd wanted to. It serves you jolly well right."

"There's no excuse for your conduct," Philip insisted. "A stranger passing through the village would have thought a lunatic asylum had broken loose."

"Oh, well, it's a jolly good thing to break loose sometimes—even for lunatics," Sylvia retorted. "If you could break loose yourself sometimes you'd be much easier to live with."

"The next time you feel repressed," he said, "all I ask is that you'll choose a place where we're not quite so well known in which to give vent to your feelings."

The argument went on endlessly, for neither Sylvia nor Philip would yield an inch; it became, indeed, one of the eternal disputes that reassert themselves at the least excuse. If Philip's egg were not cooked long enough, the cause would finally be referred back to that Sunday morning; if Sylvia were late for lunch, her unpunctuality would ultimately be dated from the arrival of the Treacherites.

Luckily the vicar, with whom the events of that Sunday had grown into a comic myth that was continually being added to, was able to give Sylvia relief from Philip's exaggerated disapproval. Moreover, the Treacherites had done him a service by advertising his church and bringing a certain number of strangers there every Sunday out of curiosity; these pilgrims inflated the natives of Green Lanes with a sense of their own importance, and they now filled the church, taking pride and pleasure in the ownership of an attraction and boasting to the natives of the villages round about the size of the offertory. Mr. Dorward's popery and ritualism were admired now as commercial smartness, and if he had chosen to ride into church on Palm Sunday or any other Sunday on a donkey (a legendary ceremony invariably attributed to High Church vicars), there was not a man, woman, or child in the parish of Green Lanes that would not have given a prod of encouragement to the sacred animal.

One hot September afternoon Sylvia was walking back from Medworth when she was overtaken by Mr. Pluepott in his cart. They stopped to exchange the usual country greetings, at which by now Sylvia was an adept. When presently Mr. Pluepott invited her to take advantage of a lift home she climbed up beside him. For a while they jogged along in silence; suddenly Mr. Pluepott delivered himself of what was evidently much upon his mind:

"Mrs. Iredale," he began, "you and me has known each other the best part of two years, and your coming and having a cup of tea with Mrs. Pluepott once or twice and Mrs. Pluepott having a big opinion of you makes me so bold."

He paused and reined in his pony to a walk that would suit the gravity of his communication.

"I'd like to give you a bit of a warning as from a friend and, with all due respect, an admirer. Being a married man myself and you a young lady, you won't go for to mistake my meaning when I says to you right out that women is worse than the devil. Miss Horne! As I jokingly said to Mrs. Pluepott, though, being a sacred subject, she wouldn't laugh, 'Miss Horne!' I said. 'Miss Horns! That's what she ought to be called.' Mrs. Iredale," he went on, pulling up the pony to a dead, stop and turning round with a very serious countenance to Sylvia—"Mrs. Iredale, you've got a wicked, bad enemy in that old woman."

"I know," she agreed. "We quarreled over something."

"If you quarreled, and whether it was your fault or whether it was hers, isn't nothing to do with me, but the lies she's spreading around about you and the Reverend Dorward beat the band. I'm not speaking gossip. I'm not going by hearsay. I've heard her myself, and Miss Hobart's as bad, if not worse. There, now I've told you and I hope you'll pardon the liberty, but I couldn't help it."

With which Mr. Pluepott whipped up his pony to a frantic gallop, and very soon they reached the outskirts of Green Lanes, where Sylvia got down.

"Thanks," she said, offering her hand. "I don't think I need bother about Miss Horne, but it was very kind of you to tell me. Thanks very much," and with a wave of her stick Sylvia walked pensively along into the village. As she passed Mr. Dorward's cottage she rattled her stick on his gate till he looked out from a window in the thatch, like a bird disturbed on its nest.

"Hullo, old owl!" Sylvia cried. "Come down a minute. I want to say something to you."

The vicar presently came blinking out into the sunlight of the garden.

"Look here," she said, "do you know that those two old villains in Oaktown are spreading it about that you and I are having a love-affair? Haven't you got a prescription for that sort of thing in your church business? Can't you curse them with bell, book, and candle, or something? I'll supply the bell, if you'll supply the rest of the paraphernalia."

Dorward shook his head. "Can't be done. Cursing is the prerogative of bishops. Not on the best terms with my bishop, I'm afraid. Last time he sent for me I had to spend the night and I left a rosary under my pillow. He was much pained, my spies at the Palace tell me."

"Well, if *you* don't mind, I don't mind," she said. "All right. So long."

Three days later, an anonymous post-card was sent to Sylvia, a vulgar Temptation of St. Anthony; and a week afterward Philip suddenly flung a letter down before her which he told her to read. It was an ill-spelled ungrammatical screed, which purported to warn Philip of his wife's behavior, enumerated the hours she had spent alone with Dorward either in his cottage or in the church, and wound up with the old proverb of there being none so

blind as those who won't see. Sylvia blushed while she read it, not for what it said about herself, but for the vile impulse that launched this smudged and scabbled impurity.

"That's a jolly thing to get at breakfast," Philip said.

"Beastly," she agreed. "And your showing it to me puts you on a level with the sender."

"I thought it would be a good lesson for you," he said.

"A lesson?" she repeated.

"Yes, a lesson that one can't behave exactly as one likes, particularly in the country among a lot of uneducated peasants."

"But I don't understand," Sylvia went on. "Did you show me this filthy piece of paper with the idea of asking me to change my manner of life?"

"I showed it to you in order to impress upon you that people talk, and that you owe it to me to keep their tongues quiet."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Something perfectly simple," Philip said. "I want you to give up visiting Dorward in his cottage and, as you have no religious inclinations, I should like you to avoid his church."

"And that's why you showed me this anonymous letter?"

He nodded.

"In fact you're going to give it your serious attention?" she continued.

"Not at all," he contradicted. "For a long time I've objected to your friendship with Dorward, but, knowing you were too headstrong to listen to my advice, I said nothing. This letter makes it impossible to keep silent any longer about my wishes."

"But you don't really believe that Dorward and I are having an affair?" she gasped.

Philip made an impatient gesture.

"What a foolish question! Do you suppose that if I had for one moment thought such a thing I shouldn't have spoken before? No, no, my dear, it's all very unpleasant, but you must see that as soon as I am made aware, however crude the method of bringing it to my knowledge, that people are talking about you and my vicar, I have no alternative but to forbid you to do anything that will make these tongues go on wagging."

"To forbid me?" she repeated.

Philip bowed ironically, Sylvia thought; the gesture, infinitely slight and unimportant as it was, cut the last knot.

"I shall have to tell Mr. Dorward about this letter and explain to him," she said.

Philip hesitated for a moment. "Yes, I think that would be the best thing to do," he agreed.

Sylvia regarded him curiously.

"You don't mind his knowing that you showed it to me?" she asked.

"Not at all," said Philip.

She laughed, and he took alarm at the tone.

"I thought you were going to be sensible," he began, but she cut him short.

"Oh, I am, my dear man. Don't worry."

Now that the unpleasant scene was over, he seemed anxious for her sympathy.

"I'm sorry this miserable business has occurred, but you understand, don't you, that it's been just as bad for me as for you?"

"Do you want me to apologize?" Sylvia demanded, in her brutal way.

"No, of course not. Only I thought perhaps you might have shown a little more appreciation of my feelings."

"Ah, Philip, if you want that, you'll have to let me really go wrong with Dorward."

"Personally I consider that last remark of yours in very bad taste; but I know we have different standards of humor."

Sylvia found Dorward in the church, engaged in an argument with Cassandra about the arrangement of the chrysanthemums for Michaelmas.

"I will not have them like this," he was saying.

"But we always putts them fan-shaped like that."

"Take them away," he shouted, and, since Cassandra still hesitated, he flung the flowers all over the church.

The short conversation that followed always remained associated in Sylvia's mind with Cassandra's grunts and her large base elevated above the pews, while she browsed hither and thither, bending over to pick up the scattered chrysanthemums.

"Mr. Dorward, I want to ask you something very serious."

He looked at her sharply, almost suspiciously.

"Does it make you very much happier to have faith?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," he said, brushing petals from his cassock.

"But would it make me?"

"I expect so—I expect so," he said, still brushing and trying with that shy curtness to avoid the contact of reality.

"Well, how can I get faith?"

"You must pray, dear lady, you must pray."

"You'll have to pray for me," Sylvia said.

"Always do. Always pray for you. Never less than three prayers every day. Mass once a week."

Sylvia felt a lump in her throat; it seemed to her that this friend, accounted mad by the world, had paid her the tenderest and most exquisite courtesy she had ever known.

"Come along now, Cassandra," cried the vicar, clapping his hands impatiently to cover his embarrassment.

"Where are the flowers? Where are the flowers, you miserable old woman?"

Cassandra came up to him, breathing heavily with exertion. "You know, Mr. Dorward, you're enough to try the patience of an angel on a tomb; you are indeed."

Sylvia left them arguing all over again about the chrysanthemums. That afternoon she went away from Green Lanes to London.

Three months later, she obtained an engagement in a musical comedy company on tour and sent back to Philip the last shred of clothing that she had had through him, with a letter and ten pounds in bank-notes:

You *must* divorce me now. I've not been able to earn enough to pay you back more than this for your bad bargain. I don't think I've given any more pleasure to the men who have paid less for me than you did, if that's any consolation.

SYLVIA SCARLETT.

## CHAPTER VIII

SYLVIA stood before the looking-glass in the Birmingham lodgings and made a speech to herself:

"Humph! You look older, my dear. You look more than nineteen and a half. You're rather glad, though, aren't you, to have finished with the last three months? You feel degraded, don't you? What's that you say? You don't feel degraded any more by what you've done now than by what you did when you were married? You consider the net result of the last three months has simply been to prove what you'd suspected for a long time—the wrong you did yourself in marrying Philip Iredale? Wait a minute; don't go so fast; there's something wrong with your moral sense. You know perfectly well your contention is impossible; or do you accuse every woman who marries to have a position and a home of being a prostitute? Ah, but you didn't marry Philip for either of those reasons, you say? Yes, you did—you married him to make something like Arbour End."

Tears welled up in Sylvia's eyes. She thought she had driven Arbour End from her mind forever.

"Come, come, we don't want any tears. What are you crying for? You knew when you left Green Lanes that everything which had come into your life through Philip Iredale must be given up. You were rather proud of your ruthlessness. Don't spoil it now. That's right, no more tears. You're feeling a bit *abrutie*, aren't you? My advice to you is to obliterate the last three months from your imagination. I quite understand that you suffered a good deal, but novices must be prepared to suffer. In my opinion you can congratulate yourself on having come through so easily. Here you are, a jolly little *cabotine* with a complete contempt for men. You're not yet twenty; you're not likely to fall in love, for you must admit that after those three months the word sounds more than usually idiotic. From what I've seen of you I should say that for the future you'll be very well able to look after yourself; you might even become a famous actress. Ah, that makes you smile, eh?"

Sylvia dabbed her face with the powder-puff and went down-stairs to dinner. Her two companions had not yet begun; for this was the first meal at which they would all sit down together, and an atmosphere of politeness hung over life at present. Lily Haden and Dorothy Lonsdale had joined the "Miss Elsie of Chelsea" company at the same time as Sylvia, and were making their first appearance on any stage, having known each other in the dullness of West Kensington. For a fortnight they had clung together, but, having been given an address for rooms in Birmingham that required a third person's contribution, they had invited Sylvia to join them. Lily was a tall, slim girl with very fair, golden hair, who had an air of romantic mystery that was due to indolence of mind and body. Dorothy also was fair, with a mass of light-brown hair, a perfect complexion, profile, and figure, and, what finally gave her a really distinguished beauty in such a setting, brown eyes instead of blue. Lily's languorous grace of manner and body was so remarkable that in a room it was difficult to choose between her and Dorothy, but behind the footlights there was no comparison; there Dorothy had everybody's glances, and Lily's less definite features went for nothing.

Each girl was prompt to take Sylvia into her confidence about the other. Thus from Lily she learned that Dorothy's real name was Norah Caffyn; that she was the eldest of a very large family; that Lily had known her at school; that she had been engaged to a journalist who was disapproved of by her family; that she had offered to break with Wilfred Curlew, if she were allowed to go on the stage; and that she had taken the name of Lonsdale from the road where she lived, and Dorothy from the sister next to her.

"I suppose in the same way as she used to take her dolls?" Sylvia suggested.

Lily looked embarrassed. She was evidently not sure whether a joke was intended, and when Sylvia encouraged her to suppose it was, she laughed a little timidly, being rather doubtful if it were not a pun.

"Her sister was awfully annoyed about it, because she hasn't got a second name. She's the only one in the family who hasn't."

Lily also told Sylvia something about herself, how her mother had lately died and how she could not get on with her sister, who had married an actor and was called Doris. Her mother had been a reciter, and there had always been lots of theatrical people at their house, so it had been easy for her to get an introduction to Mr. Walter Keal, who had the touring rights of all John Richards's great Vanity Theater productions.

From Dorothy Sylvia learned that she had known Lily at school, but not for long, as Mrs. Haden never paid her daughters' fees; that Mr. Haden had always been supposed to live in Burmah, but that people who knew Mrs. Haden declared he had never existed; and finally that Lily had been "awfully nice" to herself and helped her to get an introduction to Mr. Walter Keal.

The association of Sylvia with the two girls begun at Birmingham was not interrupted until the end of the tour. Lily and Dorothy depended upon it, Lily because Sylvia saved her the trouble of thinking for herself, Dorothy because she found in Sylvia some one who could deflect all the difficulties of life on tour and leave her free to occupy herself with her own prosperity and her own comforts. Dorothy possessed a selfishness that almost attained to the dignity of ambition, though never quite, as her conceit would not allow her to state an object in her career, for fear of failure; her method was invariably to seize the best of any situation that came along, whether it was a bed, a chair, a potato, or a man; this method with ordinary good luck would insure success through life. Lily was too lazy to minister to

Dorothy's selfishness; moreover, she often managed in taking the nearest and easiest to rob Dorothy of the best.

Sylvia was perfectly aware of their respective characters, but she was always willing to give herself any amount of trouble to preserve beauty around her; Lily and Dorothy were not really more troublesome than two cats would have been; in fact, rather less, because at any rate they could carry themselves, if not their bags.

Life on tour went its course with the world divided into three categories—the members of the company, the public expressing its personality in different audiences, and for the actors saloon-bars and the drinks they were stood, for the actresses admirers and the presents they were worth. Sometimes when the saloon-bars and the admirers were alike unprofitable, the members of the company mixed among themselves whether in a walk round a new town or at tea in rooms where a landlady possessed hospitable virtues. Sylvia had a special gift for getting the best out of landladies, and the men of the company came more often to tea with herself and her friends than with the other ladies. They came, indeed, too often to please Dorothy, who disapproved of Lily's easy-going acceptance of the sort of love that is made because at the moment there is nothing else to do. She spoke to Sylvia about this, who agreed with her, but thought that with Lily it was inevitable.

"But not with boys in the company," Dorothy urged, disdainfully. "It makes us all so cheap. I don't want to put on side, but, after all, we are a little different from the other girls."

Sylvia found this belief universal in the chorus. She could not think of any girl who had not at one time or another taken her aside and claimed for herself, and by the politeness owed to present company for Sylvia, this "little difference."

"Personally," Sylvia said, "I think we're all much the same. Some of us drop our aitches, others our p's and q's; some of us sing flat, the rest sing sharp; and we all look just alike when we're waiting for the train on Sunday morning."

Nevertheless, with all her prevision of a fate upon Lily's conduct, Sylvia did speak to her about the way in which she tolerated the familiarity of the men in the company.

"I suppose you're thinking of Tom," Lily said.

"Tom, Dick, and Harry," Sylvia put in.

"Well. I don't like to seem stuck up," Lily explained. "Tom's always very nice about carrying my bag and getting me tea when we're traveling."

"If I promise to look after the bag," Sylvia asked, "will you promise to discourage Tom?"

"But, my dear, why should you carry my bag when I can get Tom to do it?"

"It bores me to see you and him together," Sylvia explained. "These boys in the company are all very well, but they aren't really men at all."

"I know," Lily said, eagerly. "That's what I feel. They don't seem real to me. Of course, I shouldn't let anybody make love to me seriously."

"What do you call serious love-making?"

"Oh, Sylvia, how you do go on asking questions. You know perfectly well what I mean. You only ask questions to make me feel uncomfortable."

"Just as I might disarrange the cushions of your chair?"

"I know quite well who's been at you to worry me," Lily went on. "I know it's Dorothy. She's always been used to being the eldest and finding fault with everybody else. She doesn't really mind Tom's kissing me—she's perfectly ready to make use of him herself—but she's always thinking about other people and she's so afraid that some of the men she goes out with will laugh at his waistcoat. I'm used to actors; she isn't. I never bother about her. I don't complain about her practising her singing or talking for hours and hours about whether I think she looks better with a teardrop or without. Why can't she let me alone? Nobody ever lets me alone. It's all I've ever asked all my life."

The feeling between Lily and Dorothy was reaching the point of tension. Sylvia commented on it one evening to Fay Onslow, the oldest member of the chorus, a fat woman, wise and genial, universally known as Onzie except by her best boy of the moment, who had to call her Fay. However, she cost him very little else, and was generally considered to throw herself away, though, of course, as her friends never failed to add, she was getting on and could no longer afford to be too particular.

"Well, between you and I, Sylvia, I've often wondered you've kept your little family together for so long. I've been on the stage now for twenty-five years. I'm not far off forty, dear. I used to be in burlesque at the old Frivolity."

"Do you remember Victoria Deane?" Sylvia asked.

"Of course I do. She made a big hit and then got married and left the stage. A sweetly pretty little thing, she was. But, as I was saying, dear, in all my experience I never knew two fair girls get through a tour together without falling out, two girls naturally fair, that is, and you mark my words, Lily Haden and Dolly Lonsdale will have a row."

Sylvia was anxious to avert this, because she would have found it hard to choose between their rival claims upon her. She was fonder of Lily, but she was very fond of Dorothy, and she believed that Dorothy might attain real success in her profession. It seemed more worth while to take trouble over Dorothy; yet something warned her that an expense of devotion in that direction would ultimately be, from a selfish point of view, wasted. Dorothy would never consider affection where advancement was concerned; yet was it not just this quality in her that she admired? There would certainly be an unusual exhilaration in standing behind Dorothy and helping her to rise and rise, whereas with Lily the best that could be expected was to prevent her falling infinitely low.

"How I've changed since I left Philip," she said to herself. "I seem to have lost myself somehow and to have transferred all my interest in life to other people. I suppose it won't last. God forbid I should become a problem to myself like a woman in a damned novel. Down with introspection, though, Heaven knows, observation in 'Miss Elsie of Chelsea' is not a profitable pastime."

Sylvia bought an eye-glass next day, and though all agreed with one another in private that it was an affectation, everybody assured her that she was a girl who could wear an eye-glass with advantage. Lily thought the cord must be rather a bore.

"It's symbolic," Sylvia declared to the dressing-room.

"I think I'll have my eyes looked at in Sheffield," said Onzie. "There's a doctor there who's very good to pros. I

often feel my eyes are getting a bit funny. It may be the same as Sylvia's got."

The tour was coming to an end; the last three nights would be played at Oxford, to which everybody looked forward. All the girls who had been to Oxford before told wonderful tales of the pleasures that might be anticipated. Even some of the men were heard to speculate if such or such a friend were still there, which annoyed those who could not even boast of having had a friend there two years ago. The jealous ones revenged themselves by criticizing the theatrical manners of the undergraduate, especially upon the last night of a musical comedy. One heard a great deal of talk, they said, about a college career, but personally and without offense to anybody present who had friends at college, they considered that a college career in nine cases out of ten meant rowdiness and a habit of thinking oneself better than other people.

Sylvia, Lily, and Dorothy had rooms in Eden Square, which was the recognized domain of theatrical companies playing in Oxford. Numerous invitations to lunch and tea were received, and Sylvia, who had formed a preconceived idea of Oxford based upon Philip, was astonished how little the undergraduates she met resembled him. Dorothy managed with her usual instinct for the best to secure as an admirer Lord Clarehaven, or, as the other girls preferred to call him with a nicer formality, the Earl of Clarehaven. He invited her with a friend to lunch at Christ Church on the last day. Dorothy naturally chose Sylvia, and, as Lily was already engaged elsewhere, Sylvia accepted. Later in the afternoon Dorothy proposed that the young men should come back and have tea in Eden Square, and Sylvia divined Dorothy's intention of proving to these young men that the actress in her own home would be as capable of maintaining propriety as she had been at lunch.

"We'll buy the cakes on the way," said Dorothy, which was another example of her infallible instinct for the best and the most economical.

Loaded with *éclairs*, meringues, and chocolates, Dorothy, Sylvia, and their four guests reached Eden Square.

"You'll have to excuse the general untidiness," Dorothy said, with an affected little laugh, flinging open the door of the sitting-room. She would probably have chosen another word for the picture of Lily sitting on Tom's knee in the worn leather-backed arm-chair if she had entered first: unfortunately, Lord Clarehaven was accorded that privilege, and the damage was done. Sylvia quickly introduced everybody, and nobody could have complained of the way in which the undergraduates sailed over an awkward situation, nor could much have been urged against Tom, for he left immediately. As for Lily, she was a great success with the young men and seemed quite undisturbed by the turn of events.

As soon as the three girls were alone together, Dorothy broke out:

"I hope you don't think I'll ever live with you again after that disgusting exhibition. I suppose you think just because you gave me an introduction that you can do what you like. I don't know what Sylvia thinks of you, but I can tell you what I think. You make me feel absolutely sick. That beastly chorus-boy! The idea of letting anybody like that even look at you. Thank Heaven, the tour's over. I'm going down to the theater. I can't stay in this room. It makes me blush to think of it. I'll take jolly good care who I live with in future."

Then suddenly, to Sylvia's immense astonishment, Dorothy slapped Lily's face. What torments of mortification must be raging in that small soul to provoke such an unlady-like outburst!

"I should hit her back if I were you, my lass," Sylvia advised, putting up her eye-glass for the fray; but Lily began to cry and Dorothy flounced out of the room.

Sylvia bent over her in consolation, though her sense of justice made her partly excuse Dorothy's rage.

"How did I know she would bring her beastly men back to tea? She only did it to brag about having a lord to our digs. After all, they're just as much mine as hers. I was sorry for Tom. He doesn't know anybody in Oxford, and he felt out of it with all the other boys going out. He asked me if I was going to turn him down because I'd got such fine friends. I was sorry for him, Sylvia, and so I asked him to tea. I don't see why Dorothy should turn round and say nasty things to me. I've always been decent to her. Oh, Sylvia, you don't know how lonely I feel sometimes."

This appeal was too much for Sylvia, who clasped Lily to her and let her sob forth her griefs upon her shoulder.

"Sylvia, I've got nobody. I hate my sister Doris. Mother's dead. Everybody ran her down, but she had a terrible life. Father used to take drugs, and then he stole and was put in prison. People used to say mother wasn't married, but she was. Only the truth was so terrible, she could never explain. You don't know how she worked. She brought up Doris and me entirely. She used to recite, and she used to be always hard up. She died of heart failure, and that comes from worry. Nobody understands me. I don't know what will become of me."

"My dear," Sylvia said, "you know I'm your pal."

"Oh, Sylvia, you're a darling! I'd do anything for you."

"Even carry your own bag at the station to-morrow?"

"No, don't tease me," Lily begged. "If you won't tease me, I'll do anything."

That evening Mr. Keal, with the mighty Mr. Richards himself, came up from London to see the show. The members of the chorus were much agitated. It could only mean that girls were to be chosen for the Vanity production in the autumn. Every one of them put on rather more make-up than usual, acted hard all the time she was on the stage, and tried to study Mr. Richards's face from the wings.

"You and I are one of the 'also rans,'" Sylvia told Lily. "The great man eyed me with positive dislike."

In the end it was Dorothy Lonsdale who was engaged for the Vanity: she was so much elated that she was reconciled with Lily and told everybody in the dressing-room that she had met a cousin at Oxford, Arthur Lonsdale, Lord Cleveden's son.

"Which side of the road are you related to him?" Sylvia asked. Dorothy blushed, but she pretended not to understand what Sylvia meant, and said quite calmly that it was on her mother's side. She parted with Sylvia and Lily very cordially at Paddington, but she did not invite either of them to come and see her at Lonsdale Road.

Sylvia and Lily stayed together at Mrs. Gowndry's in Finborough Road, for it happened that the final negotiations for Sylvia's divorce from Philip were being concluded and she took pleasure in addressing her communications from the house where she had been living when he first met her. Philip was very anxious to make her an allowance, but she declined it; her case was undefended. Lily and she managed to get an engagement in another touring company, which opened in August somewhere on the south coast. About this time Sylvia read in a paper that Jimmy Monkley had been sentenced to three years' penal servitude for fraud, and by an odd coincidence



in the same paper she read of the decree nisi made absolute that set Philip and herself free. Old associations seemed to be getting wound up. Unfortunately, the new ones were not promising; no duller collection of people had surely ever been gathered together than the company in which she was working at present. Not only was the company tiresome, but Sylvia and Lily failed to meet anywhere on the tour one amusing person. To be sure, Lily thought that Sylvia was too critical, and therefore so alarming that several "nice boys" were discouraged too early in their acquaintanceship for a final judgment to be passed upon them.

"The trouble is," said Sylvia, "that at this rate we shall never make our fortunes. I stipulate that, if we adopt a gay life, it really will be a gay life. I don't want to have soul-spasms and internal wrestles merely for the sake of being bored."

Sylvia tried to produce Lily as a dancer; for a week or two they worked hard at imitations of the classical school, but very soon they both grew tired of it.

"The nearest we shall ever get to jingling our money at this game," Sylvia said, "is jingling our landlady's ornaments on the mantelpiece. Lily, I think we're not meant for the stage. And yet, if I could only find my line, I believe.... I believe.... Oh, well, I can't, and so there's an end of it. But look here, winter's coming on. We've got nothing to wear. We haven't saved a penny. Ruin stares us in the face. Say something, Lily; do say something, or I shall scream."

"I don't think we ought to have eaten those plums at dinner. They weren't really ripe," Lily said.

"Well, anyhow, that solves the problem of the moment. Put your things on. You'd better come out and walk them off."

They were playing in Eastbourne that week, where a sudden hot spell had prolonged the season farther into September than usual; a new company of entertainers known as "The Highwaymen" was attracting audiences almost as large as in the prime of summer. Sylvia and Lily paused to watch them from the tamarisks below the Marina.

Suddenly Sylvia gave an exclamation.

"I do believe that's Claude Raglan who's singing now. Do you remember, Lily, I told you about the Pink Pierrots? I'm sure it is."

Presently the singer came round with the bag and a packet of his picture post-cards. Sylvia asked if he had a photograph of Claude Raglan. When he produced one she dug him in the ribs, and cried:

"Claudie, you consumptive ass, don't you recognize me? Sylvia."

He was delighted to see her again, and willingly accepted an invitation to supper after the show, if he might bring a friend with him.

"Jack Airdale—an awfully decent fellow. Quite a good voice, too, though I think from the point of view of the show it's a mistake to have a high barytone when they've already got a tenor. However, he does a good deal of accompanying. In fact, he's a much better accompanist than he is singer."

"I suppose you've got more girls than ever in love with you, now you wear a mask?" said Sylvia.

Claude seemed doubtful whether to take this remark as a compliment to his voice or as an insult to his face. Finally he took it as a joke and laughed.

"Just the same, I see," he said. "Always chaffing a fellow."

Claude Raglan and Jack Airdale came to supper in due course. Sylvia liked Jack; he was a round-faced young man in the early twenties, with longish light hair that flopped all over his face when he became excited. Sylvia and he were good friends immediately and made a great deal of noise over supper, while Claude and Lily looked at each other.

"How's the consumption, Claudie?" Sylvia asked.

Claude sighed with a soulful glance at Lily's delicate form.

"Don't imagine she's sympathizing with you," Sylvia cried. "She's only thinking about plums."

"He's grown out of it," Airdale said. "Look at the length of his neck."

"I have to wear these high collars. My throat...." Claude began.

"Oh, shut up with your ailments," Sylvia interrupted.

"Hear, hear," Airdale shouted. "Down with ailments," and he threw a cushion at Claude.

"I wish you wouldn't behave like a clown," said Claude, smoothing his ruffled hair and looking to see if Lily was joining in the laugh against him.

Presently the conversation turned upon the prospects of the two girls for next winter, about which Sylvia was very pessimistic.

"Why don't we join together and run a street show—Pierrot, Pierrette, Harlequin, and Columbine?" Airdale suggested. "I'll swear there's money in it."

"About enough to pay for our coffins," said Claude. "Sing out of doors in the winter? My dear Jack, you're mad."

Sylvia thought the idea was splendid, and had sketched out Lily's Columbine dress before Lily herself had realized that the conversation had taken a twist.

"Light-blue crêpe de Chine with bunches of cornflowers for Columbine. Pierrette in dark blue with bunches of forget-me-nots, Pierrot in light blue. Silver and dark-blue lozenges for Harlequin."

"Paregoric lozenges would suit Claude better," said Airdale. "O Pagliacci! Can't you hear him? No, joking apart, I think it would be a great effort. We sha'n't have to sing much outside. We shall get invited into people's houses."

"Shall we?" Claude muttered.

"And if the show goes," Airdale went on, "we might vary our costumes. For instance, we might be Bacchanals in pink fleshings and vine leaves."

"Vine leaves," Claude ejaculated. "Vine Street more likely."

"Don't laugh, old boy, with that lung of yours," said Airdale, earnestly.

In the end, before the company left Eastbourne, it was decided, notwithstanding Claude's lugubrious prophecies, to launch the enterprise; when the tour broke up in December Sylvia had made dresses both for Lily and for herself as she had first planned them with an eye only for what became Lily. Claude's hypochondria was

appeared by letting him wear a big patchwork cloak over his harlequin's dress in which white lozenges had been substituted for silver ones, owing to lack of money. They hired a small piano very much like the one that belonged to the Pink Pierrots, and on Christmas Eve they set out from Finborough Road, where Claude and Jack had rooms near Mrs. Gowndry's. They came into collision with a party of carol-singers who seemed to resent their profane competition, and, much to Jack Airdale's disappointment, they were not invited into a single house; the money taken after three hours of wandering music was one shilling and fivepence in coppers.

"Never mind," said Jack. "We aren't known yet. It's a pity we didn't start singing last Christmas Eve. We should have had more engagements than we should have known what to do with this year."

"We must build up the show for next year," Sylvia agreed, enthusiastically.

"I shall sing the 'Lost Chord' next year," Claude answered. "They may let me in, if I worry them outside heaven's gates, to hear that last Amen."

Jack and Sylvia were justified in their optimism, for gradually the Carnival Quartet, as they called themselves, became known in South Kensington, and they began to get engagements to appear in other parts of London. Jack taught Sylvia to vamp well enough on the guitar to accompany herself in duets with him; Claude looked handsome in his harlequin's dress, which prosperity had at last endowed with silver lozenges; Lily danced actively enough for the drawing-rooms in which they performed; Sylvia, inspired by the romantic exterior of herself and her companions, invented a mime to the music of Schumann's "Carnival" which Jack Airdale played, or, as Claude said, maltreated.

The Quartet showed signs of increasing vitality with the approach of spring, and there was no need to think any more of touring in musical comedy, which was a relief to Sylvia. When summer came, they agreed to keep together and work the South Coast.

However, all these plans came suddenly to nothing, because one misty night early in March Harlequin and Columbine lost Pierrot and Pierrette on the way home from a party in Chelsea; a brief note from Harlequin to Pierrot, which he found when he got home, indicated that the loss should be considered permanent.

This treachery was a shock to Sylvia, and she was horrified at herself for feeling it so deeply. Ever since that day in Oxford when Lily had sobbed out her griefs, Sylvia had concentrated upon her all the capacity for affection which had begun to blossom during the time she was with Philip and which had been cut off ruthlessly with everything else that belonged to life with him. She knew that she should have foreseen the possibility, nay the probability, of this happening, but she had charmed herself with the romantic setting of their musical adventure and let all else go.

"I'm awfully sorry, Sylvia," said Jack; "I ought to have kept a better lookout on Claude."

"It's not your fault, old son. But, O God! why can't four people stay friends without muddling everything up with this accursed love?"

Jack was sympathetic, but it was useless to confide in him her feeling for Lily; he would never understand. She would seem to him so little worth while; for him the behavior of such a one meant less than the breaking of a porcelain figure.

"It did seem worth while," Sylvia said to herself, that night, "to keep that frail and lovely thing from this. It was my fault, of course, for I knew both Lily and Claude through and through. Yet what does it matter? What a fool I am. It was absurd of me to imagine we could go on forever as we were. I don't really mind about Lily; I'm angry because my conceit has been wounded. It serves me right. But that dirty little actor won't appreciate her. He's probably sick of her easiness already. Oh, why the hell am I not a man?"

Presently, however, Sylvia's mood of indignation burned itself out; she began to attribute the elopement of Claude and Lily to the characters they had assumed of Harlequin and Columbine, and to regard the whole affair as a scene from a play which must not be taken more deeply to heart than with the pensive melancholy that succeeds the fall of the curtain on mimic emotions. After all, what had Lily been to her more than a puppet whose actions she had always controlled for her pleasure until she was stolen from her? Without Lily she was once more at a loose end; there was the whole history of her sorrow.

"I can't think what they wanted to run away for," said Jack. Sylvia fancied the flight was the compliment both Harlequin and Columbine had paid to her authority.

"I don't find you so alarming," he said.

"No, old son, because you and I have always regarded the Quartet from a strictly professional point of view, and consequently each other. Meanwhile the poor old Quartet is done in. We two can't sustain a program alone."

Airdale gloomily assented, but thought it would be well to continue for a week or so, in case Claude and Lily came back.

"I notice you take it for granted that I'll be willing to continue busking with them," Sylvia said.

That evening Airdale and she went out as usual; but the loss of the other two seemed somehow to have robbed the entertainment of its romantic distinction, and Sylvia was dismayed to find with what a shameful timidity she now took herself and her guitar into saloon-bars; she felt like a beggar and was humiliated by Jack's apologetic manner, and still more by her own instinctive support of such cringing to the benevolence of potmen and barmaids.

One evening, after about a week of these distasteful peregrinations, the two mountebanks came out of a public house in Fulham Road where they had been forced to endure a more than usually intolerable patronage. Sylvia vowed she would not perform again under such conditions, and they turned up Tinderbox Lane to wander home. This thoroughfare, only used by pedestrians, was very still, and trees planted down the middle of the pavement gave to the mild March evening an effluence of spring. Sylvia began to strum upon her guitar the tune that Arthur Madden and she sang together from the windows at Hampstead on the night she met him first; her companion soon caught hold of the air, and they strolled slowly along, dreaming, she looking downward of the past, he of the future with his eyes fixed on the chimneys of the high flats that encircled the little houses and long gardens of Tinderbox Lane. They were passing a wall on their right in which numbered doors were set at intervals. From one of these a tall figure emerged and stopped a moment to say good-by to somebody standing in the entrance. The two musicians with a simultaneous instinct for an audience that might appreciate them stopped and addressed their song to the parting pair, a tall old gentleman with drooping gray whiskers, very much muffled up, and an exceedingly stout woman of ripe middle age.

"Bravo!" said the old gentleman, in a tremulous voice, as he tapped his cane on the pavement. "Polly, this is

devilish appropriate. By gad! it makes me feel inclined to dance again, Polly,” and the old gentleman forthwith postured with his thin legs like a cardboard antic at the end of a string. The fat woman standing in the doorway came out into the lamplight, and clasping her hands in alarm, begged him not to take cold, but the old gentleman would not stop until Polly had made a pretense of dancing a few steps with him, after which he again piped, “Bravo,” vowed he must have a whisky, and invited Sylvia and Jack to come inside and join them.

“Dashwood is my name, Major-General Dashwood, and this is Mrs. Gainsborough.”

“Come along,” said Mrs. Gainsborough. “The captain—”

“She will call me Captain,” said the general, with a chuckle. “Obstinate gal! Knew me first when I was a captain, thirty-six years ago, and has never called me anything since. What a woman, though!”

“He’s very gay to-night. We’ve been celebrating our anniversary,” Mrs. Gainsborough explained, while the four of them walked along a gravel path toward a small square creeper-covered house at the end of a very long garden.

“We met first at the Argyll Rooms in March, 1867, and in September, 1869, Mulberry Cottage was finished. I planted those mulberry-trees myself, and they’ll outlive us both,” said the general.

“Now don’t let’s have any more dismals,” Mrs. Gainsborough begged. “We’ve had quite enough to-night, talking over old times.”

Mulberry Cottage was very comfortable inside, full of mid-Victorian furniture and ornaments that suited its owner, who, Sylvia now perceived by the orange lamplight, was even fatter than she had seemed at first. Her hair, worn in a chignon, was black, her face was rosy and large, almost monumental, with a plinth of chins.

The general so much enjoyed having a fresh audience for his tales, and sat so long over the whisky, that Mrs. Gainsborough became worried.

“Bob, you ought to go. You know I don’t like to argue before strangers, but your sister will be getting anxious. Miss Dashwood’s quite alone,” she explained to her guests. “I wonder if you’d mind walking back with him?” she whispered to Sylvia. “He lives in Redcliffe Gardens. That’s close to you, isn’t it?”

“If we can have music all the way, by gad! of course,” said the general, standing up so straight that Sylvia was afraid he would bump his head on the ceiling.

“Now, Bob dear, don’t get too excited and do keep your muffler well wrapped round your throat.”

The general insisted on having one more glass for the sake of old times, and there was a short delay in the garden, because he stuck his cane fast in the ground to show the size of the mulberry-trees when he planted them, but ultimately they said good night to Mrs. Gainsborough, upon whom Sylvia promised to call next day, and set out for Redcliffe Gardens to the sound of guitars.

General Dashwood turned round from time to time to shake his cane at passers-by that presumed to stare at the unusual sight of an old gentleman, respectable in his dress and demeanor, escorted down Fulham Road by two musicians.

“Do you see anything so damned odd in our appearance?” he asked Sylvia.

“Nothing at all,” she assured him.

“Sensible gal! I’ve a very good mind to knock down the next scoundrel who stares at us.”

Presently the general, on whom the fresh air was having an effect, took Sylvia’s arm and grew confidential.

“Go on playing,” he commanded Jack Airdale. “I’m only talking business. The fact is,” he said to Sylvia, “I’m worried about Polly. Hope I shall live another twenty years, but fact is, my dear, I’ve never really got over that wound of mine at Balaclava. Damme! I’ve never been the same man since.”

Sylvia wondered what he could have been before.

“Naturally she’s well provided for. Bob Dashwood always knew how to treat a woman. No wife, no children, you understand me? But it’s the loneliness. She ought to have somebody with her. She’s a wonderful woman, and she was a handsome gal. Damme! she’s still handsome—what? Fifty-five you know. By gad, yes. And I’m seventy. But it’s the loneliness. Ah, dear, if the gods had been kind; but then she’d have probably been married by now.”

The general blew his nose, sighed, and shook his head. Sylvia asked tenderly how long the daughter had lived.

“Never lived at all,” said the general, stopping dead and opening his eyes very wide, as he looked at Sylvia. “Never was born. Never was going to be born. Hale and hearty, but too late now, damme! I’ve taken a fancy to you. Sensible gal! Damned sensible. Why don’t you go and live with Polly?”

In order to give Sylvia time to reflect upon her answer, the general skipped along for a moment to the tune that Jack was playing.

“Nothing between you and him?” he asked, presently, indicating Jack with his cane.

Sylvia shook her head.

“Thought not. Very well, then, why don’t you go and live with Polly? Give you time to look round a bit. Understand what you feel about playing for your bread and butter like this. Finest thing in the world music, if you haven’t got to do it. Go and see Polly to-morrow. I spoke to her about it to-night. She’ll be delighted. So shall I. Here we are in Redcliffe Gardens. Damned big house and only myself and my sister to live in it. Live there like two needles in a haystack. Won’t ask you in. Damned inhospitable, but no good because I shall have to go to bed at once. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind pressing the bell? Left my latch-key in me sister’s work-basket.”

The door opened, and the general, after bidding Sylvia and Jack a courteous good night, marched up his front-door steps with as much martial rigidity as he could command.

On the way back to Finborough Road, Sylvia, who had been attracted to the general’s suggestion, postponed raising the question with Jack by telling him about her adventure in Redcliffe Gardens when she threw the bag of chestnuts through the window. She did not think it fair, however, to make any other arrangement without letting him know, and before she went to see Mrs. Gainsborough the next day she announced her idea and asked him if he would be much hurt by her backing out of the busking.

“My dear girl, of course not,” said Jack. “As a matter of fact, I’ve had rather a decent offer to tour in a show through the East. I should rather like to see India and all that. I didn’t say anything about it, because I didn’t want to let you down. However, if you’re all right, I’m all right.”

Mrs. Gainsborough by daylight appealed to Sylvia as much as ever. She told her what the general had said, and

Mrs. Gainsborough begged her to come that very afternoon.

"The only thing is," Sylvia objected, "I've got a friend, a girl, who's away at present, and she might want to go on living with me."

"Let her come too," Mrs. Gainsborough cried. "The more the merrier. Good Land! What a set-out we shall have. The captain won't know himself. He's very fond of me, you know. But it would be more jolly for him to have some youngsters about. He's that young. Upon my word, you'd think he was a boy. And he's always the same. Oh, dearie me! the times we've had, you'd hardly believe. Life with him was a regular circus."

So it was arranged that Sylvia should come at once to live with Mrs. Gainsborough in Tinderbox Lane, and Jack went off to the East.

The general used to visit them nearly every afternoon, but never in the evening.

"Depend upon it, Sylvia," Mrs. Gainsborough said, "he got into rare hot water with his sister the other night. Of course it was an exception, being our anniversary, and I dare say next March, if we're all spared, he'll be allowed another evening. It's a great pity, though, that we didn't meet first in June. So much more seasonable for jollifications. But there, he was young and never looked forward to being old."

The general was not spared for another anniversary. Scarcely a month after Sylvia had gone to live with Mrs. Gainsborough, he died very quietly in the night. His sister came herself to break the news, a frail old lady who seemed very near to joining her brother upon the longest journey.

"She'll never be able to keep away from him," Mrs. Gainsborough sobbed. "She'll worry and fret herself for fear he might catch cold in his coffin. And look at me! As healthy and rosy as a great radish!"

The etiquette of the funeral caused Mrs. Gainsborough considerable perplexity.

"Now tell me, Sylvia, ought I or ought I not to wear a widow's veil? Miss Dashwood inviting me in that friendly way, I do want to show that I appreciate her kindness. I know that strictly we weren't married. I dare say nowadays it would be different, but people was much more old-fashioned about marrying ballet-girls when I was young. Still, it doesn't seem hardly decent for me to go gallivanting to his funeral in me black watered silk, the same as if I were going to the upper boxes of a theater with Mrs. Marsham or Mrs. Beardmore."

Sylvia told Mrs. Gainsborough that in her opinion a widow's cap at the general's funeral would be like the dash of mauve at the wedding in the story. She suggested the proper thing to do would be to buy a new black dress unprofaned by visits to the upper boxes.

"If I can get such an out size in the time," Mrs. Gainsborough sighed, "which is highly doubtful."

However, the new dress was obtained, and Mrs. Gainsborough went off to the funeral at Brompton.

"On, it was a beautiful ceremony," she sobbed, when she got home. "And really Miss Dashwood, well, she couldn't have been nicer. Oh, my poor dear captain, if only all the clergyman said was true. And yet I should feel more comfortable somehow if it wasn't. Though I suppose if it was true there'd be no objection to our meeting in heaven as friends only. Dear me, it all sounded so real when I heard the clergyman talking about it. Just as if he was going up in a lift, as you might say. So natural it sounded. 'A gallant soldier,' he said, 'a veteran of the Crimea.' So he was gallant, the dear captain. You should have seen him lay out two roughs who tried to snatch me watch and chain once at the Epsom Derby. He was a gentleman, too. I'm sure nobody ever treated any woman kinder than he treated me. Seventy years old he was. Captain Bob Dashwood of the Seventeenth Hussars. I can see him now as he used to be. He liked to come stamping up the garden. Oh, he was a stamper, and 'Polly,' he hollered out, 'get on your frills. Here's Dick Avon—the Markiss of Avon *that was*' (oh, he was a wild thing) 'and Jenny Ward' (you know, she threw herself off Westminster Bridge and caused such a stir in Jubilee year). People talked a lot about it at the time. I remember we drove to the Star and Garter at Richmond that day—a lovely June day it was—and caused quite a sensation, because we all looked so smart. Oh, my Bob, my Bob, it only seems yesterday."

Sylvia consoled Mrs. Gainsborough and rejoiced in her assurance that she did not know what she should have done.

"Fancy him thinking about me being so lonely and wanting you to come and live with me. Depend upon it he knew he was going to die all of a sudden," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "Oh, there's no doubt he was clever enough to have been a doctor. Only of course with his family he had to be a soldier."

Sylvia mostly spent these spring days in the garden with Mrs. Gainsborough, listening to her tales about the past and helping her to overlook the labors of the jobbing gardener who came in twice a week. Her landlady or hostess (for the exact relation was not yet determined) was very strict in this regard, because her father had been a nursery gardener and she insisted upon a peculiar knowledge of the various ways in which horticultural obligations could be avoided. When Sylvia raised the question of her status at Mulberry Cottage, Mrs. Gainsborough always begged her not to be in a hurry to settle anything; later on, when Sylvia was able to earn some money, she should pay for her board, but payment for her lodging, so long as Mrs. Gainsborough was alive and the house was not burned to the ground, was never to be mentioned. That was certainly the captain's intention and it must be respected.

Sylvia often went to see Mrs. Gowndry in Finborough Road in case there should be news of Lily. Her old landlady was always good enough to say that she missed her, and in her broken-up existence the affection even of Mrs. Gowndry was very grateful.

"I've told me old man to keep a good lookout for her," said Mrs. Gowndry.

"He's hardly likely to meet her at his work," Sylvia said.

"Certainly not. No. But he often goes up to get a breath of air—well—it isn't to be expected that he wouldn't. I often say to him when he comes home a bit grumbly that his profession is as bad as a miner's, and *they* only does eight hours, whereas in his lavatory they does twelve. Too long, too long, and it must be fidgety work, with people bobbing in and out all the time and always in a hurry, as you might say. Of course now and again you get a lodger who makes himself unpleasant, but, year in year out, looking after lodgers is a more peaceful sort of a life than looking after a lavatory. Don't you be afraid, Miss Scarlett. If ever a letter comes for you our Tommy shall bring it straight round, and he's a boy as can be trusted not to lose anything he's given. You wouldn't lose the pretty lady's letter, would you, Tommy? You never lose nothing, do you?"

"I lost a acid-drop once."

"There, fancy him remembering. That's a hit for his ma, that is. He'd only half sucked this here acid-drop and laid it aside to finish sucking it when he went up to bed, and I must have swept it up, not thinking what it was. Fancy him remembering. He don't talk much, but he's a artful one."

Tommy had a bagful of acid-drops soon after this, for he brought a letter to Sylvia from Lily:

DEAR SYLVIA,—I suppose you're awfully angry with me, but Claude went on tour a month ago, and I hate being alone. I wonder if this will find you. I'm staying in rotten rooms in Camden Town. 14 Winchester Terrace. Send me a card if you're in London.

Loving,

LILY.

Sylvia immediately went over to Camden Town and brought Lily away from the rooms, which were indeed "rotten." When she had installed her at Mulberry Cottage she worked herself up to having a clear understanding with Lily, but when it came to the point she felt it was useless to scold her except in fun, as a child scolds her doll. She did, however, treat her henceforth in what Mrs. Gainsborough called a "highly dictatorial way." Sylvia thought she could give Lily the appearance of moral or immoral energy, however impossible it might be to give her the reality. With this end in view she made Lily's will entirely subordinate to her own, which was not difficult. The affection that Sylvia now had for her was not so much tender as careful, the affection one might feel for a bicycle rather than for a horse. She was always brutally frank with herself about their relation to each other, and because she never congratulated herself upon her kindness she was able to sustain her affection.

"There is nothing so fickle as a virtuous impulse," Sylvia declared to herself. "It's a kind of moral usury which is always looking for a return on the investment. The moment the object fails to pay an exorbitant interest in gratitude, the impulse to speculate withers up. The lowest circle in hell should be reserved for people who try to help others and cannot understand why their kindness is not appreciated. Really that was Philip's trouble. He never got over being hurt that I didn't perpetually remind him of his splendid behavior toward me. I suppose I'm damned inhuman. Well, well, I couldn't have stood those three months after I left him if I hadn't been."

The affair between Lily and Claude Raglan was not much discussed. He had, it seemed, only left her because his career was at stake; he had received a good offer and she had not wished to detain him.

"But is it over between you?" Sylvia demanded.

"Yes, of course, it's over—at any rate, for a long time to come," Lily answered. "He cried when he left me. He really was a nice boy. If he lives, he thinks he will be a success—a real success. He introduced me to a lot of nice boys."

"That was rash of him," Sylvia laughed. "Were they as nice as the lodgings he introduced you to?"

"No, don't laugh at him. He couldn't afford anything else."

"But why in Heaven's name, if you wanted to play around together, had you got to leave Finborough Road?"

Lily blushed faintly. "You won't be angry if I tell you?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"Claude said he couldn't bear the idea that you were looking at us. He said it spoiled everything."

"What did he think I was going to do?" Sylvia snapped. "Put pepper on the hymeneal pillow?"

"You said you wouldn't be angry."

"I'm not."

"Well, don't use long words, because it makes me think you are."

Soon after Lily came to Tinderbox Lane, Sylvia met Dorothy Lonsdale with a very lovely dark girl called Olive Fanshawe, a fellow-member of the Vanity chorus. Dorothy was glad to see her, principally, Sylvia thought, because she was able to talk about lunch at Romano's and supper at the Savoy.

"Look here," Sylvia said. "A little less of the Queen of Sheba, if you don't mind. Don't forget I'm one of the blokes as is glad to smell the gratings outside a baker's."

Miss Fanshawe laughed, and Sylvia looked at her quickly, wondering if she were worth while.

Dorothy was concerned to hear she was still with Lily. "That dreadful girl," she simpered.

"Oh, go to hell," said Sylvia, sharply, and walked off.

Next day a note came from Dorothy to invite her and Lily to tea at the flat she shared with Olive.

"Wonderful how attractive rudeness is," Sylvia commented.

"Oh, do let's go. Look, she lives in Half Moon Street," Lily said.

"And a damned good address for the demi-monde," Sylvia added.

However, the tea-party was definitely a success, and for the rest of the summer Sylvia and Lily spent a lot of time on the river with what Sylvia called the semicircle of intimate friends they had brought away from Half Moon Street. She grew very fond of Olive Fanshawe and warned her against her romantic adoration of Dorothy.

"But you're just as romantic over Lily," Olive argued.

"Not a single illusion left, my dear," Sylvia assured her. "Besides, I should never compare Lily with Dorothy. Dorothy is more beautiful, more ambitious, more mercenary. She'll probably marry a lord. She's acquired the art of getting a lot for nothing to a perfection that could only be matched by a politician or a girl with the same brown eyes in the same glory of light-brown hair. And when it suits her she'll go back on her word just as gracefully, and sell her best friend as readily as a politician will sell his country."

"You're very down on politicians. I think there's something so romantic about them," Olive declared. "Young politicians, of course."

"My dear, you'd think a Bradshaw romantic."

"It is sometimes," said Olive.

"Well, I know two young politicians," Sylvia continued. "A Liberal and a Conservative. They both spend their whole time in hoping I sha'n't suggest walking down Bond Street with them, the Liberal because I may see a frock and the Conservative because he may meet a friend. They both make love to me as if they were addressing their

future constituents, with a mixture of flattery, condescension, and best clothes; but they reserve all their affection for the constituency. As I tell them, if they'd fondle the constituency and nurse me, I should endure their company more easily. Unhappily, they both think I'm intelligent, and a man who admires a woman's intelligence is like a woman who admires her friend's looking-glass—each one is granting an audience to himself."

"At any rate," said Olive, "you've managed to make yourself quite a mystery. All the men we know are puzzled by you."

"Tell them, my dear, I'm quite simple. I represent the original conception of the Hetæra, a companion. I don't want to be made love to, and every man who makes love to me I dislike. If I ever do fall in love, I'll be a man's slave. Of that I'm sure. So don't utter dark warnings, for I've warned myself already. I do want a certain number of things—nice dresses, because I owe them to myself, good books, and—well, really, I think that's all. In return for the dresses and the books—I suppose one ought to add an occasional fiver just to show there's no ill feeling about preferring to sleep in my own room—in return for very little. I'm ready to talk, walk, laugh, sing, dance, tell incomparably bawdy stories, and, what is after all the most valuable return of all, I'm ready to sit perfectly still and let myself be bored to death while giving him an idea that I'm listening intelligently. Of course, sometimes I do listen intelligently without being bored. In that case I let him off with books only."

"You really are an extraordinary girl," said Olive.

"You, on the other hand, my dear," Sylvia went on, "always give every man the hope that if he's wise and tender, and of course lavish—ultimately all men believe in the pocket—he will be able to cry Open Sesame to the mysterious treasure of romantic love that he discerns in your dark eyes, in your caressing voice, and in your fervid aspirations. In the end you'll give it all to a curly-headed actor and live happily ever afterward at Ravenscourt Park. Farewell to Coriolanus in his smart waistcoat; farewell to Julius Cæsar and his amber cigarette-holder; farewell to every nincompoop with a top-hat as bright as a halo; farewell incidentally to Dolly Lonsdale, who'll discover that Ravenscourt Park is too difficult for the chauffeur to find."

"Oh, Sylvia, shut up!" Olive said. "I believe you drank too much champagne at lunch."

"I'm glad you reminded me," Sylvia cried. "By Jove! I'd forgotten the fizz. That's where we all meet on common ground—or rather, I should say in common liquid. It sounds like mixed bathing. It is a kind of mixed bathing, after all. You're quite right, Olive, whatever our different tastes in men, clothes, and behavior, we all must have champagne. Champagne is a bloody sight thicker than water, as the prodigal said when his father uncorked a magnum to wash down the fatted calf."

Gradually Sylvia did succeed in sorting out from the various men a few who were content to accept the terms of friendship she offered. She had to admit that most of them fell soon or late, and with each new man she gave less and took more. As regards Lily, she tried to keep her as unapproachable as herself, but it was not always possible. Sometimes with a shrug of the shoulders she let Lily go her own way, though she was always hard as steel with the fortunate suitor. Once a rich young financier called Hausberg, who had found Lily somewhat expensive, started a theory that Sylvia was living on her friend; she heard of the slander and dealt with it very directly. The young man in question was anxious to set Lily up in a flat of her own. Sylvia let Lily appear to view the plan with favor. The flat was taken and furnished; a date was fixed for Lily's entrance; the young man was given the latch-key and told to come at midnight. When he arrived, there was nobody in the flat but a chimpanzee that Sylvia had bought at Jamrack's. She and Lily were at Brighton with Arthur Lonsdale and Tony Clarehaven, whom they had recently met again at a Covent Garden ball.

They were both just down from Oxford, and Lonsdale had taken a great fancy to Lily. He was a jolly youth, whose father, Lord Cleveden, had consented after a struggle to let him go into partnership with a distinguished professional motorist. It was with him that Dorothy Lonsdale claimed distant kinship. Clarehaven's admiration for Dorothy had not diminished; somebody had told him that the best way to get hold of her would be to make her jealous. This was his object in inviting Sylvia to Brighton. Sylvia agreed to go, partly to tease Dorothy, partly to disappoint Clarehaven. Lonsdale had helped her to get the chimpanzee into the flat, and all the way down to Brighton they laughed.

"My word, you know!" Lonsdale chuckled, "the jolly old chimpanzee will probably eat the wall-paper. What do you think Hausberg will say when he opens the door?"

"I expect he'll say, 'Are you there, Lily?'" Sylvia suggested.

"What do you think the jolly old chimpanzee will do? Probably bite his ear off—what? Topping. Good engine this. We're doing fifty-nine or an unripe sixty. Why does a chicken cross the road? No answer, thank you, this time. Must slow down a bit. There's a trap somewhere here. I say, you know, I've got a sister called Sylvia. Hullo! hullo! Mind your hoop, Tommy! Too late. Funeral on Friday. Colonial papers please copy. I wonder how they'll get the chimpanzee out again. I told the hall porter, when he cast a cold and glassy eye on the crate, it was a marble Venus that Mr. Hausberg was going to use as a hat-stand. My word! I expect the jolly old flat looks like the last days of Pompeii by now. When I undid the door of the crate the brute was making a noise like a discontented cistern. I rapidly scattered Brazil nuts and bananas on the floor to occupy his mind and melted away like a strawberry ice on a grill. Hullo! We're getting into Brighton."

Clarehaven did not enjoy his week-end, for it consisted entirely of a lecture by Sylvia on his behavior. This caused him to drink many more whisky-and-sodas than usual, and he came back to London on Monday with a bad headache, which he attributed to Sylvia's talking.

"My dear man, I haven't got a mouth. You have," she said.

This week-end caused a quarrel between Sylvia and Dorothy, for which she was not sorry. She had recently met a young painter, Ronald Walker, who wanted Lily to sit for him; he had taken them once or twice to the Café Royal, which Sylvia had found a pleasant change from the society of Half Moon Street. Soon after this Lonsdale began a liaison with Queenie Molyneux, of the Frivolity Theater. The only member of the Half Moon Street set with whom Sylvia kept up a friendship was Olive Fanshawe.

**D**URING her second year at Mulberry Cottage Sylvia achieved an existence that, save for the absence of any one great motive like art or love, was complete. She had also one real friend in Jack Airdale, who had returned from his tour. Apart from the pleasant security of knowing that he would always be content with good-fellowship only, he encouraged her to suppose that somewhere, could she but find the first step, a career lay before her. Sylvia did not in her heart believe in this career, but in moments of depression Jack's confidence was of the greatest comfort, and she was always ready to play with the notion, particularly as it seemed to provide a background for her present existence and to cover the futility of its perfection. Jack was anxious that she should try to get on the proper stage, but Sylvia feared to destroy by premature failure a part of the illusion of ultimate success she continued to allow herself by finally ruling out the theater as one of the possible channels to that career. In the summer Lily became friendly with one or two men whom Sylvia could not endure, but a lassitude had descended upon her and she lacked any energy to stop the association. As a matter of fact she was sickening for diphtheria at the time, and while she was in the hospital Lily took to frequenting the Orient promenade with these new friends. As soon as Sylvia came out they were banished; but each time that she intervened on Lily's behalf it seemed to her a little less worth while. Nevertheless, finding that Lily was bored by her own habit of staying in at night, she used much against her will to accompany her very often to various places of amusement without a definite invitation from a man to escort them.

One day at the end of December Mrs. Gainsborough came home from shopping with two tickets for a fancy-dress dance at the Redcliffe Hall in Fulham Road. When the evening arrived Sylvia did not want to go, for the weather was raw and foggy; but Mrs. Gainsborough was so much disappointed at her tickets not being used that to please her Sylvia agreed to go. It seemed unlikely to be an amusing affair, so she and Lily went in the most ordinary of their fancy dresses as masked Pierrettes. The company, as they had anticipated, was quite exceptionally dull.

"My dear, it's like a skating-rink on Saturday afternoon," Sylvia said. "We'll have one more dance together and then go home."

They were standing at the far end of the hall near the orchestra, and Sylvia was making disdainful comments upon the various couples that were passing out to refresh themselves or flirt in the draughty corridors.

Suddenly Sylvia saw a man in evening dress pushing his way in their direction, regardless of what ribbons he tore or toes he outraged in his transit. He was a young man of about twenty-three or twenty-four, with a countenance in which eagerness was curiously mixed with impassivity. Sylvia saw him as one sees a picture on first entering a gallery, which one postpones visiting with a scarcely conscious and yet perfectly deliberate anticipation of pleasure later on. She continued talking to Lily, who had her back to the new-comer; while she talked she was aware that all her own attention was fixed upon this new-comer and that she was asking herself the cause of the contradictions in his face and deciding that it was due to the finely carved immobile mouth beneath such eager eyes. Were they brown or blue? The young man had reached them, and from that immobile mouth came in accents that were almost like despair a salutation to Lily. Sylvia felt for a moment as if she had been wounded; she saw that Lily was looking at her with that expression she always put on when she thought Sylvia was angry with her; then after what seemed an age turned round slowly to the young man and, lifting her mask, engaged in conversation with him. Sylvia felt that she was trespassing upon the borders of great emotion and withdrew out of hearing, until Lily beckoned her forward to introduce the young man as Mr. Michael Fane. Sylvia did not raise her mask, and after nodding to him again retired from the conversation.

"But this is absurd," she said to herself, after a while; and abruptly raising her mask she broke in upon the duologue. The music had begun. He was asking Lily to dance, and she, waiting for Sylvia's leave in a way that made Sylvia want to slap her, was hesitating.

"What rot, Lily!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "Of course you may dance."

The young man turned toward Sylvia and smiled. A moment later he and Lily had waltzed away.

"Good God!" said Sylvia to herself. "Am I going mad? A youth smiles at me and I feel inclined to cry. What is this waltz they're playing?"

She looked at one of the sheets of music, but the name was nowhere legible, and she nearly snatched it away from the player in exasperation. Nothing seemed to matter in the world except that she should know the name of this waltz. Without thinking what she was doing she thumped the clarinet-player on the shoulder, who stopped indignantly and asked if she was trying to knock his teeth out.

"What waltz are you playing? What waltz are you playing?"

"'Waltz Amarousse.' Perhaps you'll punch one of the strings next time, miss?"

"Happy New-Year," Sylvia laughed, and the clarinet-player with a disgusted glance turned round to his music again.

By the time the dance was over and the other two had rejoined her, Sylvia was laughing at herself; but they thought she was laughing at them. Fane and Lily danced several more dances together, and gradually Sylvia made up her mind that she disapproved of this new intimacy, this sudden invasion of Lily's life from the past from which she should have cut herself off as completely as Sylvia had done from her own. What right had Lily to complicate their existence in this fashion? How unutterably dull this masquerade was! She whispered to Lily in the next interval that she was tired and wanted to go home.

The fog outside was very dense. Fane took their arms to cross the road, and Sylvia, though he caught her arm close to him, felt drearily how mechanical its gesture was toward her, how vital toward Lily. Neither of her companions spoke to each other, and she asked them questions about their former friendship, which Lily did not answer because she was evidently afraid of her annoyance, and which he did not answer because he did not hear. Sylvia had made up her mind that Fane should not enter Mulberry Cottage, when Lily whispered to her that she should ask him, but at the last moment she remembered his smile and invited him to supper. A strange shyness took possession of her, which she tried to cover by exaggeration, almost, she thought, hysterical fooling with Mrs. Gainsborough that lasted until two o'clock in the morning of New-Year's day, when Michael Fane went home after exacting a promise from the two girls to lunch with him at Kettner's that afternoon. Lily was so sleepy that she did not rise to see him out. Sylvia was glad of the indifference.

Next morning Sylvia found out that Michael was a "nice boy" whom Lily had known in West Kensington when she was seventeen. He had been awfully in love with her, and her mother had been annoyed because he wanted to marry her. He had only been seventeen himself, and like many other school-boy loves of those days this one had just

ended somehow, but exactly how Lily could not recall. She wished that Sylvia would not go on asking so many questions; she really could not remember anything more about it. They had gone once for a long drive in a cab, and there had been a row about that at home.

"Are you in love with him now?" Sylvia demanded.

"No, of course not. How could I be?"

Sylvia was determined that she never should be, either: there should be no more Claude Raglans to interfere with their well-devised existence.

During the next fortnight Sylvia took care that Lily and Michael should never be alone together, and she tried very often, after she discovered that Michael was sensitive, to shock him by references to their life, and with an odd perverseness to try particularly to shock him about herself by making brutally coarse remarks in front of Lily, taking pleasure in his embarrassment. Yet there was in the end little pleasure in shocking him, for he had no conventional niceness; yet there was a pleasure in hurting him, a fierce pleasure.

"Though why on earth I bother about his feelings, I can't imagine," Sylvia said to herself. "All I know is that he's an awful bore and makes us break all sorts of engagements with other people. You liar! You know he's not a bore, and you know that you don't care a damn how many engagements you break. Don't pose to yourself. You're jealous of him because you think that Lily may get really fond of him. You don't want her to get fond of him, because you don't think she's good enough for him. You don't want him to get fond of *her*."

The boldness of this thought, the way in which it had attacked the secret recesses of her being, startled Sylvia. It was almost a sensation of turning pale at herself, of fearing to understand herself, that made her positively stifle the mood and flee from these thoughts, which might violate her personality.

Down-stairs, there was a telegram from Olive Fanshawe at Brighton, begging Sylvia to come at once; she was terribly unhappy; Sylvia could scarcely tear herself away from Mulberry Cottage at such a moment even for Olive, but, knowing that if she did not go she would be sorry, she went.

Sylvia found Olive in a state of collapse. Dorothy Lonsdale and she had been staying in Brighton for a week's holiday, and yesterday Dorothy had married Clarehaven. Sylvia laughed.

"Oh, Sylvia, don't laugh!" Olive begged. "It was perfectly dreadful. Of course it was a great shock to me, but I did not show it. I told her she could count on me as a pal to help her in every way. And what do you think she said? Sylvia, you'll never guess. It was too cruel. She said to me in a voice of ice, dear—really, a voice of ice—she said the best way I could help her was by not seeing her any more. She did not intend to go near the stage door of a theater again. She did not want to know any of her stage friends any more. She didn't even say she was sorry; she was quite calm. She was like ice, Sylvia dear. Clarehaven came in and she asked if he'd telegraphed to his mother, and when he said he had she got up as if she'd been calling on me quite formally and shook hands, and said: 'Good-by, Olive. We're going down to Clare Court to-morrow, and I don't expect we shall see each other again for a long time.' Clarehaven said what rot and that I must come down to Devonshire and stay with them, and Dolly froze him, my dear; she froze him with a look. I never slept all night, and the book I was reading began to repeat itself, and I thought I was going mad; but this morning I found the printers had made some mistake and put sixteen pages twice over. But I really thought I was going mad, so I wired for you. Oh, Sylvia, Sylvia, say something to console me! She was like ice, dear, really like a block of ice."

"If she'd only waited till you had found the curly-headed actor it wouldn't have mattered so much," Sylvia said.

Poor Olive really was on the verge of a nervous collapse, and Sylvia stayed with her three days, though it was agony to leave Lily in London with Michael Fane. Nor could she talk of her own case to Olive. It would seem like a competitive sorrow, a vulgar bit of egotistic assumption to suit the occasion.

When Sylvia got back to Mulberry Cottage she found an invitation from Jack Airdale to dine at Richmond and go to a dance with him afterward. Conscious from something in Michael's watchful demeanor of a development in the situation, she was pleased to be able to disquiet him by insisting that Lily should go with her.

On the way, Sylvia extracted from Lily that Michael had asked her to marry him. It took all Jack Airdale's good nature not to be angry with Sylvia that night—as she tore the world to shreds. At the moment when Lily had told her she had felt with a despair that was not communicable, as Olive's despair had been, how urgent it was to stop Michael from marrying Lily. She was not good enough for him. The knowledge rang in her brain like a discordant clangor of bells, and Sylvia knew in that moment that the real reason of her thinking this was jealousy of Lily. The admission tortured her pride, and after a terrible night in which the memory of Olive's grief interminably dwelt upon and absorbed helped her to substitute the pretense, so passionately invoked that it almost ceased to be a pretense, that she was opposing the marriage partly because Michael would never keep Lily faithful, partly because she could not bear the idea of losing her friend.

When, the next day, Sylvia faced Michael for the discussion of the marriage, she was quite sure not merely that he had never attracted her, but even that she hated him and, what was more deadly, despised him. She taunted him with wishing to marry Lily for purely sentimental reasons, for the gratification of a morbid desire to save her. She remembered Philip, and all the hatred she had felt for Philip's superiority was transferred to Michael. She called him a prig and made him wince by speaking of Lily and herself as "tarts," exacting from the word the uttermost tribute of its vulgarity. She dwelt on Lily's character and evolved a theory of woman's ownership by man that drove her into such illogical arguments and exaggerated pretensions that Michael had some excuse for calling her hysterical. The dispute left Lily on one side for a time and became personal to herself and him. He told her she was jealous. In an access of outraged pride she forgot that he was referring to her jealousy about Lily, and to any one less obsessed by an idea than he was she would have revealed her secret. Suddenly he seemed to give way. When he was going he told her that she hated him because he loved Lily and hated him twice as much because his love was returned.

Sylvia felt she would go mad when Michael said that he loved Lily; but he was thinking it was because Lily loved him that she was biting her nails and glaring at him. Then he asked her what college at Oxford her husband had been at. She had spoken of Philip during their quarrel. This abrupt linking of himself with Philip restored her balance, and coolly she began to arrange in her mind for Lily's withdrawal from London for a while. Of passion and fury there was nothing left except a calm determination to disappoint Master Michael. She remembered Olive Fanshawe's, "Like ice, dear, she was like a block of ice." She, too, was like a block of ice as she watched him walking away down the long garden.



When Michael had gone Sylvia told Lily that marriage with him was impossible.

"Why do you want to be married?" she demanded. "Was your mother so happy in her marriage? I tell you, child, that marriage is almost inconceivably dull. What have you got in common with him? Nothing, absolutely nothing."

"I'm not a bit anxious to be married," Lily protested. "But when somebody goes on and on asking, it's so difficult to refuse. I liked Claude better than I like Michael. But Claude had to think about his future."

"And what about your future?" Sylvia exclaimed.

"Oh, I expect it'll be all right. Michael has money."

"I say you shall not marry him," Sylvia almost shouted.

"Oh, don't keep on so," Lily fretfully implored. "It gives me a headache. I won't marry him if it's going to upset you so much. But you mustn't leave me alone with him again, because he worries me just as much as you do."

"We'll go away to-morrow," Sylvia announced, abruptly. It flashed upon her that she would like to go to Sirene with Lily, but, alas! there was not enough money for such a long journey, and Bournemouth or Brighton must be the colorless substitute.

Lily cheered up at the idea of going away, and Sylvia was half resentful that she could accept parting from Michael so easily. Lily's frocks were not ready the next day, and in the morning Michael's ring was heard.

"Oh, now I suppose we shall have more scenes," Lily complained.

Sylvia ran after Mrs. Gainsborough, who was waddling down the garden path to open the door.

"Come back, come back at once!" she cried. "You're not to open the door."

"Well, there's a nice thing. But it may be the butcher."

"We don't want any meat. It's not the butcher. It's Fane. You're not to open the door. We've all gone away."

"Well, don't snap my head off," said Mrs. Gainsborough, turning back unwillingly to the house.

All day long at intervals the bell rang.

"The neighbors 'll think the house is on fire," Mrs. Gainsborough bewailed.

"Nobody hears it except ourselves, you silly old thing," Sylvia said.

"And what 'll the passers-by think?" Mrs. Gainsborough asked. "It looks so funny to see any one standing outside a door, ringing all day long like a chimney-sweep who's come on Monday instead of Tuesday. Let me go out and tell him you've gone away. I'll hold the door on the jar, the same as if I was arguing with a hawker. Now be sensible, Sylvia. I'll just pop out, pop my head round the door, and pop back in again."

"You're not to go. Sit down."

"You do order any one about so. I might be a serviette, the way you crumple me up. Sylvia, don't keep prodding into me. I may be fat, but I have got some feelings left. You're a regular young spiteful. A porter wouldn't treat luggage so rough. Give over, Sylvia."

"What a fuss you make about nothing!" Sylvia said.

"Well, that ping-ping-pinging gets on my nerves. I feel as if I were coming out in black spots like a domino. Why don't the young fellow give over? It's a wonder his fingers aren't worn out."

The ringing continued until nearly midnight in bursts of half an hour at a stretch. Next morning Sylvia received a note from Fane in which he invited her to be sporting and let him see Lily.

"How I hate that kind of gentlemanly attitude!" she scoffed to herself.

Sylvia wrote as unpleasant a letter as she could invent, which she left with Mrs. Gainsborough to be given to Michael when he should call in answer to an invitation she had posted for the following day at twelve o'clock. Then Lily and she left for Brighton. All the way down in the train she kept wondering why she had ended her letter to Michael by calling him "my little Vandyck." Suddenly she flew into a rage with herself, because she knew that she was making such speculation an excuse to conjure his image to her mind.

Toward the end of February Sylvia and Lily came back to Mulberry Cottage. Sylvia had awakened one morning with the conviction that it was beneath her dignity to interfere further between Lily and Michael. She determined to leave everything to fate. She would go and stay with Olive for a while, and if Lily went away with Michael, so much the better. To hell with both of them. This resolution once taken, Sylvia, who had been rather charming to Lily all the time at Brighton, began now to treat her with a contempt that was really an expression of the contempt she felt for Michael. A week after their return to London she spent the whole of one day in ridiculing him so cruelly that even Mrs. Gainsborough protested. Then she was seized with an access of penitence, and, clasping Lily to her, she almost entreated her to vow that she loved her better than any one else in the world. Lily, however, was by this time thoroughly sulky and would have nothing to do with Sylvia's tardy sweetness. The petulant way in which she shook herself free from the embrace at last brought Sylvia up to the point of leaving Lily to herself. She should go and stay with Olive Fanshawe, and if, when she came back, Lily were still at Mulberry Cottage, she would atone for the way she had treated her lately; if she were gone, it would be only one more person ruthlessly cut out of her life. It was curious to think of everybody—Monkley, Philip, the Organs, Mabel, the twins, Miss Ashley, Dorward, all going on with their lives at this moment regardless of her.

"I might just as well be dead," she told herself. "What a fuss people make about death!"

Sylvia was shocked to find how much Olive had suffered from Dorothy's treatment of her. For the first time in her life she was unable to dispose of emotion as mere romantic or sentimental rubbish; there was indeed something deeper than the luxury of grief that could thus ennoble even a Vanity girl.

"I do try, Sylvia, not to mope all the time. I keep on telling myself that, if I really loved Dorothy, I should be glad for her to be Countess of Clarehaven, with everything that she wants. She was always a good girl. I lived with her more than two years and she was *frightfully* strict about men. She deserved to be a countess. And I'm sure she's quite right in wanting to cut herself off altogether from the theater. I think, you know, she may have meant to be kind in telling me at once like that, instead of gradually dropping me, which would have been worse, wouldn't it? Only I do miss her so. She was such a lovely thing to look at."

"So are you," Sylvia said.

"Ah, but I'm dark, dear, and a dark girl never has that almost unearthly beauty that Dolly had."

"Dark girls have often something better than unearthly and seraphic beauty," Sylvia said. "They often have a gloriously earthly and human faithfulness."

"Ah, you need to tease me about being romantic, but I think it's you that's being romantic now. You were quite right, dear; I used to be stupidly romantic over foolish little things without any importance, and now it all seems such a waste of time. That's really what I feel most of all, now that I've lost my friend. It seems to me that every time I patted a dog I was wasting time."

Sylvia had a fleeting thought that perhaps Gladys and Enid Worsley might have felt like that about her, but in a moment she quenched the fire it kindled in her heart. She was not going to bask in the warmth of self-pity like a spoiled little girl that hopes she may die to punish her brother for teasing her.

"I think, you know," Olive went on, "that girls like us aren't prepared to stand sorrow. We've absolutely nothing to fall back upon. I've been thinking all these days what an utterly unsatisfactory thing lunch at Romano's really is. The only thing in my life that I can look back to for comfort is summer at the convent in Belgium. Of course we giggled all the time; but all the noise of talking has died away, and I can only see a most extraordinary peacefulness. I wonder if the nuns would have me as a boarder for a little while this summer. I feel I absolutely must go there. It isn't being sentimental, because I never knew Dorothy in those days."

Perhaps Olive's regret for her lost friend affected Sylvia. When she went back to Mulberry Cottage and found that Lily had gone away, notwithstanding her own deliberate provocation of the elopement, she was dismayed. There was nothing left of Lily but two old frocks in the wardrobe, two old frocks the color of dead leaves; and this poignant reminder of a physical loss drove out all the other emotions. She told herself that it was ridiculous to be moved like this and she jeered at herself for imitating Olive's grief. But it was no use; those two frocks affrighted her courage with their deadness. No kind of communion after marriage would compensate for the loss of Lily's presence; it was like the fading of a flower in the completeness of its death. Even if she had been able to achieve the selflessness of Olive and take delight in Lily's good fortune, how impossible it was to believe in the triumph of this marriage. Lily would either be bored or she would become actively miserable—Sylvia snorted at the adverb—and run away or rather slowly melt to damnation. It would not even be necessary for her to be miserable; any unscrupulous friend of her husband's would have his way with her. For an instant Sylvia had a tremor of compassion for Michael, but it died in the thought of how such a disillusion would serve him right. He had built up this passion out of sentimentality; he was like Don Quixote; he was stupid. No doubt he had managed by now to fall in love with Lily, but it had never been an inevitable passion, and no pity should be shown to lovers that did not love wildly at first sight. They alone could plead fate's decrees.

Jack Airdale came to see Sylvia, and he took advantage of her despair to press his desire for her to go upon the stage. He was positive that she had in her the makings of a great actress. He did not want to talk about himself, but he must tell Sylvia that there was a wonderful joy in getting on. He would never, of course, do anything very great, but he was understudy to some one or other at some theater or other, and there was always a chance of really showing what he could do one night or at any rate one afternoon. Even Claude was getting on; he had met him the other day in a tail coat and a top-hat. Since there had been such an outcry against tubercular infection, he had been definitely cured of his tendency toward consumption; he had nothing but neurasthenia to contend with now.

But Sylvia would not let Jack "speak about her" to the managers he knew. She had no intention of continuing as she was at present, but she should wait till she was twenty-three before she took any step that would involve anything more energetic than turning over the pages of a book; she intended to dream away the three months that were left to twenty-two. Jack Airdale went away discouraged.

Sylvia met Ronald Walker, who had painted Lily. From him she learned that Fane had taken a house for her somewhere near Regent's Park. By a curious coincidence, a great friend of his who was also a friend of Fane's had helped to acquire the house. Ronald understood that there was considerable feeling against the marriage among Fane's friends. What was Fane like? He knew several men who knew him, and he seemed to be one of those people about whose affairs everybody talked.

"Thank Heaven, nobody bothers about me," said Ronald. "This man Fane seems to have money to throw about. I wish he'd buy my picture of Lily. You're looking rather down, Sylvia. I suppose you miss her? By Jove! what an amazing sitter! She wasn't really beautiful, you know—I mean to say with the kind of beauty that lives outside its setting. I don't quite mean that, but in my picture of her, which most people consider the best thing I've done, she never gave me what I ought to have had from such a model. I felt cheated, somehow, as if I'd cut a bough from a tree and in doing so destroyed all its grace. It was her gracefulness really; and dancing's the only art for that. I can't think why I didn't paint you."

"You're not going to begin now," Sylvia assured him.

"Well, of course, now you challenge me," he laughed. "The fact is, Sylvia, I've never really seen you in repose till this moment. You were always tearing around and talking. Look here, I do want to paint you. I say, let me paint you in this room with Mrs. Gainsborough. By Jove! I see exactly what I want."

"It sounds as if you wanted an illustration for the Old and New Year," Sylvia said.

In the end, however, she gave way; and really, it passed the time, sitting for Ronald Walker with Mrs. Gainsborough in that room where nothing of Lily remained.

"Well," Mrs. Gainsborough declared, when the painter had finished. "I knew I was fat, but really it's enough to make any one get out of breath just to look at any one so fat as you've made me. He hasn't been stingy with his paint, I'll say that. But really, you know, it looks like a picture of the fat woman in a fair. Now Sylvia's very good. Just the way she looks at you with her chin stuck out like a step-ladder. Your eyes are very good, too. He's just got that nasty glitter you get into them sometimes."

One day in early June, without any warning, Michael Fane revisited Mulberry Cottage. Sylvia had often declaimed against him to Mrs. Gainsborough, and now while they walked up the garden she could see that Mrs. Gainsborough was nervous, and by the way that Michael walked either that he was nervous or that something had happened. Sylvia came down the steps from the balcony to meet them, and, reading in his countenance that he had come to ask her help, she was aware of an immense relief, which she hid under an attitude of cold hostility. They sat on the garden seat under the budding mulberry-tree, and without any preliminaries of conversation Michael told her that he and Lily had parted. Sylvia resented an implication in his tone that she would somehow be awed by this

announcement; she felt bitterly anxious to disappoint and humiliate him by her indifference, hoping that he would beg her to get Lily back for him. Instead of this he spoke of putting her out of his life, and Sylvia perceived that it was not at all to get Lily back that he had come to her. She was angry at missing her opportunity and she jeered at the stately way in which he confessed his failure and his loss; nor would he wince when she mocked his romantic manner of speech. At last she was almost driven into the brutality of picturing in unforgivable words the details of Lily's infidelity, but from this he flinched, stopping her with a gesture. He went on to give Sylvia full credit for her victory, to grant that she had been right from the first, and gradually by dwelling on the one aspect of Lily that was common to both of them, her beauty, he asked her very gently to take Lily back to live with her again. Sylvia could not refrain from sneers, and he was stung into another allusion to her jealousy, which Sylvia set out to disprove almost mathematically, though all the time she was afraid of what clear perception he might not have attained through sorrow. But he was still obsessed by the salvation of Lily; and Sylvia, because she could forgive him for his indifference to her own future except so far as it might help Lily, began to mock at herself, to accuse herself for those three months after she left Philip, to rake up that corpse from its burial-place so that this youth who troubled her very soul might turn his face from her in irremediable disgust and set her free from the spell he was unaware of casting.

When she had worn herself out with the force of her denunciation both of herself and of mankind, he came back to his original request; Sylvia, incapable of struggling further, yielded to his perseverance, but with a final flicker of self-assertion she begged him not to suppose that she was agreeing to take Lily back for any other reason than because she wanted to please herself.

Michael began to ask her about Lily's relation to certain men with whom he had heard her name linked—with Ronald Walker, and with Lonsdale, whom he had known at Oxford. Sylvia told him the facts quite simply; and then because she could not bear this kind of self-torture he was inflicting on himself, she tried to put out of its agony his last sentimental regret for Lily by denying to her and by implication to herself also the justification even of a free choice.

"Money is necessary sometimes, you know," she said.

Sylvia expected he would recoil from this, but he accepted it as the statement of a natural fact, agreed with its truth, and begged that in the future if ever money should be necessary he should be given the privilege of helping. So long as it was apparently only Lily whom he desired to help thus, Michael had put forward his claims easily enough. Then in a flash Sylvia felt that now he was transferring half his interest in Lily to her. He was stumbling hopelessly over that; he was speaking in a shy way of sending her books that she would enjoy; then abruptly he had turned from her and the garden door had slammed behind him. It was with a positive exultation that Sylvia realized that he had forgotten to give her Lily's address and that it was the dread of seeming to intrude upon her which had driven him away like that. She ran after him and called him back. He gave her a visiting-card on which his name was printed above the address; it was like a little tombstone of his dead love. He was talking now about selling the furniture and sending the money to Lily. Sylvia all the time was wondering why the first man that had ever appealed to her in the least should be like the famous hero of literature that had always bored her. With an impulse to avenge Michael she asked the name of the man for whom Lily had betrayed him. But he had never known; he had only seen his hat.

Sylvia pulled Michael to her and kissed him with the first kiss she had given to any man that was not contemptuous either of him or of herself.

"How many women have kissed you suddenly like that?" she asked.

"One—well, perhaps two!" he answered.

Even this kiss of hers was not hers alone, but because she might never see him again Sylvia broke the barrier of jealousy and in a sudden longing to be prodigal of herself for once she gave him all she could, her pride, by letting him know that she for her part had never kissed any man like that before.

Sylvia went back to the seat under the mulberry-tree and made up her mind that the time was ripe for activity again. She had allowed herself to become the prey of emotion by leading this indeterminate life in which sensation was cultivated at the expense of incident. It was a pity that Michael had intrusted her with Lily, for at this moment she would have liked to be away out of it at once; any adventure embarked upon with Lily would always be bounded by her ability to pack in time. Sylvia could imagine how those two dresses she had left behind must have been the most insuperable difficulty of the elopement. Another objection to Lily's company now was the way in which it would repeatedly remind her of Michael.

"Of course it won't remind me sentimentally," Sylvia assured herself. "I'm not such a fool as to suppose that I'm going to suffer from a sense of personal loss. On the other hand, I sha'n't ever be able to forget what an exaggerated impression I gave him. It's really perfectly damnable to divine one's sympathy with a person, to know that one could laugh together through life, and by circumstances to have been placed in an utterly abnormal relation to him. It really is damnable. He'll think of me, if he ever thinks of me at all, as one of the great multitude of wronged women. I shall think of him—though as a matter of fact I shall avoid thinking of him—either as what might have been, a false concept, for of course what might have been is fundamentally inconceivable, or as what he was, a sentimental fool. However, the mere fact that I'm sitting here bothering my head about what either of us thinks shows that I need a change of air."

That afternoon a parcel of books arrived for Sylvia from Michael Fane; among them was Skelton's *Don Quixote* and Adlington's *Apuleius*, on the fly-leaf of which he had written:

I've eaten rose leaves and I am no longer a golden ass.

"No, damn his eyes!" said Sylvia, "I'm the ass now. And how odd that he should send me *Don Quixote*."

At twilight Sylvia went to see Lily at Ararat House. She found her in a strange rococo room that opened on a garden bordered by the Regent's Canal; here amid candles and mirrors she was sitting in conversation with her housekeeper. Each of them existed from every point of view and infinitely reduplicated in the mirrors, which was not favorable to toleration of the housekeeper's figure, that was like an hour-glass. Sylvia waited coldly for her withdrawal before she acknowledged Lily's greeting. At last the objectionable creature rose and, accompanied by a crowd of reflections, left the room.

"Don't lecture me," Lily begged. "I had the most awful time yesterday."

"But Michael said he had not seen you."

"Oh, not with Michael," Lily exclaimed. "With Claude."

"With Claude?" Sylvia echoed.

"Yes, he came to see me and left his hat in the hall and Michael took it away with him in his rage. It was the only top-hat he'd got, and he had an engagement for an 'at home,' and he couldn't go out in the sun, and, oh dear, you never heard such a fuss, and when Mabel—"

"Mabel?"

"—Miss Harper, my housekeeper, offered to go out and buy him another, he was livid with fury. He asked if I thought he was made of money and could buy top-hats like matches. I'm glad you've come. Michael has broken off the engagement, and I expected you rather. A friend of his—rather a nice boy called Maurice Avery—is coming round this evening to arrange about selling everything. I shall have quite a lot of money. Let's go away and be quiet after all this bother and fuss."

"Look here," Sylvia said. "Before we go any further I want to know one thing. Is Claude going to drop in and out of your life at critical moments for the rest of time?"

"Oh no! We've quarreled now. He'll never forgive me over the hat. Besides, he puts some stuff on his hair now that I don't like. Sylvia, do come and look at my frocks. I've got some really lovely frocks."

Maurice Avery, to whom Sylvia took an instant dislike, came in presently. He seemed to attribute the ruin of his friend's hopes entirely to a failure to take his advice:

"Of course this was the wrong house to start with. I advised him to take one at Hampstead, but he wouldn't listen to me. The fact is Michael doesn't understand women."

"Do you?" Sylvia snapped.

Avery looked at her a moment, and said he understood them better than Michael.

"Of course nobody can ever really understand a woman," he added, with an instinct of self-protection. "But I advised him not to leave Lily alone. I told him it wasn't fair to her or to himself."

"Did you give him any advice about disposing of the furniture?" Sylvia asked.

"Well, I'm arranging about that now."

"Sorry," said Sylvia. "I thought you were paving Michael's past with your own good intentions."

"You mustn't take any notice of her," Lily told Avery, who was looking rather mortified. "She's rude to everybody."

"Well, shall I tell you my scheme for clearing up here?" he asked.

"If it will bring us any nearer to business," Sylvia answered, "we'll manage to support the preliminary speech."

A week or two later Avery handed Lily £270, which she immediately transferred to Sylvia's keeping.

"I kept the Venetian mirror for myself," Avery said. "You know the one with the jolly little cupids in pink and blue glass. I shall always think of you and Ararat House when I look at myself in it."

"I suppose all your friends wear their hearts on your sleeve," Sylvia said. "That must add a spice to vanity."

Mrs. Gainsborough was very much upset at the prospect of the girls' going away.

"That comes of having me picture painted. I felt it was unlucky when he was doing it. Oh, dearie me! whatever shall I do?"

"Come with us," Sylvia suggested. "We're going to France. Lock up your house, give the key to the copper on the beat, put on your gingham gown, and come with us, you old sea-elephant."

"Come with you?" Mrs. Gainsborough gasped. "But there, why shouldn't I?"

"No reason at all."

"Why, then I will. I believe the captain would have liked me to get a bit of a blow."

"Anything to declare?" the customs official asked at Boulogne.

"I declare I'm enjoying myself," said Mrs. Gainsborough, looking round her and beaming at France.

## CHAPTER X

**W**HEN she once more landed on French soil, Sylvia, actuated by a classic piety, desired to visit her mother's grave. She would have preferred to go to Lille by herself, for she lacked the showman's instinct; but her companions were so horrified at the notion of being left to themselves in Paris until she rejoined them, that in the end she had to take them with her.

The sight of the old house and the faces of some of the older women in the *quartier* conjured up the past so vividly for Sylvia that she could not bring herself to make any inquiries about the rest of her family. It seemed as if she must once more look at Lille from her mother's point of view and maintain the sanctity of private life against the curiosity or criticism of neighbors. She did not wish to hear the details of her father's misdoing or perhaps be consoled with over Valentine. The simplest procedure would have been to lay a wreath upon the grave and depart again. This she might have done if Mrs. Gainsborough's genial inquisitiveness about her relatives had not roused in herself a wish to learn something about them. She decided to visit her eldest sister in Brussels, leaving it to chance if she still lived where Sylvia had visited her twelve years ago.

"Brussels," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "Well, that sounds familiar, anyway. Though I suppose the sprout-gardens are all built over nowadays. Ah dear!"

The building over of her father's nursery-garden and of many other green spots she had known in London always drew a tear from Mrs. Gainsborough, who was inclined to attribute most of human sorrow to the utilitarian schemes of builders.

"Yes, they found the Belgian hares ate up all the sprouts," Sylvia said. "And talking of hair," she went on,

"what's the matter with yours?"

"Ah, well, there! Now I meant to say nothing about it. But I've left me mahogany wash at home. There's a calamity!"

"You'd better come out with me and buy another bottle," Sylvia advised.

"You'll never get one here," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "This is a wash, not a dye, you must remember. It doesn't tint the hair; it just brings up the color and gives it a nice gloss."

"If that's all it does, I'll lend you my shoe-polish. Go along, you wicked old fraud, and don't talk to me about washes. I can see the white hairs coming out like stars."

Sylvia found Elène in Brussels, and was amazed to see how much she resembled her mother nowadays. M. Durand, her husband, had prospered and he now owned a large confectioner's shop in the heart of the city, above which Madame Durand had started a pension for economical tourists. Mrs. Gainsborough could not get over the fact that her hostess did not speak English; it struck her as unnatural that Sylvia should have a sister who could only speak French. The little Durands were a more difficult problem. She did not so much mind feeling awkward with grown-up people through having to sit dumb, but children stared at her so, if she said nothing; and if she talked, they stared at her still more; she kept feeling that she ought to stroke them or pat them, which might offend their mother. She found ultimately that they were best amused by her taking out two false teeth she had, one of which once was lost, because the eldest boy would play dice with them.

Elène gave Sylvia news of the rest of the family, though, since all the four married sisters were in different towns in France and she had seen none of them for ten years, it was not very fresh news. Valentine, in whose career Sylvia was most interested, was being very well *entretenu* by a *marseillais* who had bought her an apartment that included a porcelain-tiled bath-room; she might be considered lucky, for the man with whom she had left Lille had been a rascal. It happened that her news of Valentine was fresh and authentic, because a *lilleoise* who lived in Bruxelles had recently been obliged to go to Marseilles over some legal dispute and, meeting Valentine, had been invited to see her apartment. It was a pity that she was not married, but her position was the next best thing to marriage. Of the Bassompierres Elène had heard nothing for years, but what would interest Sylvia were some family papers and photographs that Sylvia's father had sent to her as the eldest daughter when their mother died, together with an old-fashioned photograph of their grandmother. From these papers it seemed that an English *milord* and not Bassompierre had really been their grandfather. Sylvia being half English already, it might not interest her so much, but for herself to know she had English blood *l'avait beaucoup impressionné*, so many English tourists came to her pension.

Sylvia looked at the daguerreotype of her grandmother, a glass faintly bloomed, the likeness of a ghost indeed. She then had loved an Englishman; her mother, too; herself.... Sylvia packed the daguerreotype out of sight and turned to look at a golden shawl of a material rather like crêpe de Chine, which had been used to wrap up their mother when she was a baby. Would Sylvia like it? It was no use to Elène, too old and frail and faded. Sylvia stayed in Brussels for a week and left with many promises to return soon. She was glad she had paid the visit; for it had given back to her the sense of continuity which in the shifting panorama of her life she had lost, so that she had come to regard herself as an unreal person, an exception in humanity, an emotional freak; this separation from the rest of the world had been irksome to Sylvia since she had discovered the possibility of her falling in love, because it was seeming the cause of her not being loved. Henceforth she would meet man otherwise than with defiance or accusation in her eyes; she, too, perhaps would meet a lover thus.

Sylvia folded up the golden shawl to put it at the bottom of her trunk; figuratively, she wrapped up in it her memories, tender, gay, sorrowful, vile all together.

"Soon be in Paris, shall we?" said Mrs. Gainsborough, when the train reached the eastern suburbs. "It makes one feel quite naughty, doesn't it? The captain was always going to take me, but we never went, somehow. What's that? There's the Eiffel Tower? So it is, upon my word, and just what it looks like in pictures. Not a bit different. I hope it won't fall down while we're still in Paris. Nice set-out that would be. I've always been afraid of sky accidents since a friend of mine, a Mrs. Ewings, got stuck in the Great Wheel at Earl's Court with a man who started undressing himself. It was all right, as it happened, because he only wanted to wave his shirt to his wife, who was waiting for him down below, so as she shouldn't get anxious, but it gave Mrs. Ewings a nasty turn. Two hours she was stuck with nothing in her bag but a box of little liver pills, which made her mouth water, she said, she was that hungry. She *thinks* she'd have eaten them if she'd have been alone; but the man, who was an undertaker from Wandsworth, told her a lot of interesting stories about corpses, and that kept her mind occupied till the wheel started going round again, and the Exhibition gave her soup and ten shillings compensation, which made a lot of people go up in it on the chance of being stuck."

It was strange, Sylvia thought, that she should be as ignorant of Paris as Mrs. Gainsborough, but somehow the three of them would manage to enjoy themselves. Lily was more nearly vivacious than she had ever known her.

"Quite saucy," Mrs. Gainsborough vowed. "But there, we're all young, and you soon get used to the funny people you see in France. After all, they're foreigners. We ought to feel sorry for them."

"I say steady, Mrs. Gainsborough," Lily murmured, with a frown. "Some of these people in the carriage may speak English."

"Speak English?" Mrs. Gainsborough repeated. "You don't mean to tell me they'd go on jabbering to one another in French if they could speak English! What an idea!"

A young man who had got into the compartment at Chantilly had been casting glances of admiration at Lily ever since, and it was on account of him that she had warned Mrs. Gainsborough. He was a slim, dark young man dressed by an English tailor, very diffident for a Frenchman, but when Sylvia began to speculate upon the choice of a hotel he could no longer keep silence and asked in English if he could be of any help. When Sylvia replied to him in French, he was much surprised:

*"Mais vous êtes française!"*

*"Je suis du pays de la lune,"* Sylvia said.

"Now don't encourage the young fellow to gabble in French," Mrs. Gainsborough protested. "It gives me the pins and needles to hear you. You ought to encourage people to speak English, if they want to, I'm sure."

The young Frenchman smiled at this and offered his card to Sylvia, whom he evidently accepted as the head of

the party. She read, "Hector Ozanne," and smiled for the heroic first name; somehow he did not look like Hector and because he was so modest she presented him to Lily to make him happy.

"I am enchanted to meet a type of English beauty," he said. "You must forgive my sincerity, which arises only from admiration. Madame," he went on, turning to Mrs. Gainsborough, "I am honored to meet you."

Mrs. Gainsborough, who was not quite sure how to deal with such politeness, became flustered and dropped her bag. Ozanne and she both plunged for it simultaneously and bumped their heads; upon this painful salute a general friendliness was established.

"I am a bachelor," said Ozanne. "I have nothing to occupy myself, and if I might be permitted to assist you in a research for an apartment I shall be very elated."

Sylvia decided in favor of rooms on the *rive gauche*. She felt it was a conventional taste, but held to her opinion against Ozanne's objections.

"But I have an apartment in the Rue Montpensier, with a view of the Palais Royal. I do not live there now myself. I beseech you to make me the pleasure to occupy it. It is so very good, the view of the garden. And if you like an ancient house, it is very ancient. Do you concur?"

"And where will you go?" Sylvia asked.

"I live always in my club. For me it would be a big advantage, I assure you."

"We should have to pay rent," said Sylvia, quickly.

"The rent will be one thousand a year."

"God have mercy upon us!" Mrs. Gainsborough gasped. "A thousand a year? Why, the man must think that we're the royal family broken out from Windsor Castle on the randan."

"Shut up, you silly old thing," said Sylvia. "He's asking nothing at all. Francs, not pounds. *Vous êtes trop gentil pour nous, Monsieur.*"

"*Alors, c'est entendu?*"

"*Mais oui.*"

"*Bon! Nous y irons ensemble tout de suite, n'est-ce pas?*"

The apartment was really charming. From the windows one could see the priests with their breviaries muttering up and down the old garden of the Palais Royal; and, as in all gardens in the heart of a great city, many sorts of men and women were resting there in the sunlight. Ozanne invited them to dine with him that night and left them to unpack.

"Well, I'm bound to say we seem to have fallen on our feet right off," Mrs. Gainsborough said. "I shall quite enjoy myself here; I can see that already."

The acquaintance with Hector Ozanne ripened into friendship, and from friendship his passion for Lily became obvious, not that really it had ever been anything else, Sylvia thought; the question was whether it should be allowed to continue. Sylvia asked Ozanne his intentions. He declared his desperate affection, exclaimed against the iniquity of not being able to marry on account of a mother from whom he derived his entire income, stammered, and was silent.

"I suppose you'd like me and Mrs. Gainsborough to clear out of this?" Sylvia suggested.

No, he would like nothing of the kind; he greatly preferred that they should all stay where they were as they were, save only that of course they must pay no rent in future and that he must be allowed to maintain entirely the upkeep of the apartment. He wished it to be essentially their own and he had no intention of intruding there except as a guest. From time to time no doubt Lily would like to see something of the French countryside and of the *plages*, and no doubt equally Sylvia would not be lonely in Paris with Mrs. Gainsborough. He believed that Lily loved him. She was, of course, like all English girls, cold, but for his part he admired such coldness, in fact he admired everything English. He knew that his happiness depended upon Sylvia, and he begged her to be kind.

Hector Ozanne was the only son of a rich manufacturer who had died about five years ago. The business had for some time been a limited company of which Madame Ozanne held the greater number of shares. Hector himself was now twenty-five and would within a year be found a wife by his mother; until then he would be allowed to choose a mistress by himself. He was kind-hearted, simple, and immensely devoted to Lily. She liked lunching and dining with him, and would like still better dressing herself at his expense; she certainly cared for him as much now as his future wife would care for him on the wedding-day. There seemed no reason to oppose the intimacy. If it should happen that Hector should fail to treat Lily properly, Sylvia would know how to deal with him, or rather with his mother. Amen.

July was burning fiercely and Hector was unwilling to lose delightful days with Lily; they drove away together one morning in a big motor-car, which Mrs. Gainsborough blessed with as much fervor as she would have blessed a hired brougham at a suburban wedding. She and Sylvia were left together either to visit some *plage* or amuse themselves in Paris.

"Paris I think, you uncommendable mammoth, you phosphor-eyed hippopotamus, Paris I *think*."

"Well, I should like to see a bit of life, I must say. We've led a very quiet existence so far. I don't want to go back to England and tell my friend Mrs. Marsham that I've seen nothing. She's a most enterprising woman herself. I don't think you ever saw her, did you? Before she was going to have her youngest she had a regular passion to ride on a camel. She used to dream of camels all night long, and at last, being as I said a very enterprising woman and being afraid when her youngest was born he might be a humpback through her dreaming of camels all the time, she couldn't stand it no longer and one Monday morning, which is a sixpenny day, she went off to the Zoo by herself, being seven months gone at the time, and took six rides on the camel right off the reel, as they say."

"That must have been the last straw," Sylvia said.

"Have I told you this story before, then?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"Well, that's a queer thing. I was just about to say that when she'd finished her rides she went to look at the giraffes, and one of them got hold of her straw hat in his mouth and nearly tore it off her head. She hollered out, and the keeper asked her if she couldn't read the notice that visitors was requested not to feed these animals. This

annoyed Mrs. Marsham very much, and she told the keeper he wasn't fit to manage performing fleas, let alone giraffes, which annoyed *him* very much. It's a pity you never met her. I sent her a post-card the other day, as vulgar a one as I could find, but you can buy them just as vulgar in London."

Sylvia did so far gratify Mrs. Gainsborough's desire to impress Mrs. Marsham as to take her to one or two Montmartre ballrooms; but she declared they did not come up to her expectations, and decided that she should have to fall back on her own imagination to thrill Mrs. Marsham.

"As most travelers do," Sylvia added.

They also went together to several plays, at which Sylvia laughed very heartily, much to Mrs. Gainsborough's chagrin.

"I'm bothered if I know what you're laughing at," she said, finally. "I can't understand a word of what they're saying."

"Just as well you can't," Sylvia told her.

"Now there's a tantalizing hussy for you. But I can guess, you great tomboy."

Whereupon Mrs. Gainsborough laughed as heartily as anybody in the audience at her own particular thoughts. She attracted a good deal of attention by this, because she often laughed at them without reference to what was happening on the stage. When Sylvia dug her in the ribs to make her keep quiet, she protested that, if she could only tell the audience what she was thinking, they would not bother any more about the stage.

"A penny for your thoughts, they say. I reckon mine are worth the price of a seat in the circle, anyway."

It was after this performance that Sylvia and Mrs. Gainsborough went to the Café de la Chouette, which was frequented mostly by the performers, poets, and composers of the music-hall world. The place was crowded, and they were forced to sit at a table already occupied by one of those figures that only in Paris seem to have the right to live on an equality with the rest of mankind, merely on account of their eccentric appearance. He was probably not more than forty years old, but his gauntness made him look older. He wore blue-and-white checked trousers, a tail coat from which he or somebody else had clipped off the tails, a red velvet waistcoat, and a yachting-cap. His eyes were cavernous, his cheeks were rouged rather than flushed with fever. He carried a leather bag slung round his middle filled with waste paper, from which he occasionally took out a piece and wrote upon it a few words. He was drinking an unrecognizable liqueur.

Mrs. Gainsborough was rather nervous of sitting down beside so strange a creature, but Sylvia insisted. The man made no gesture at their approach, but turned his eyes upon them with the impassivity of a cat.

"Look here, Sylvia, in two twos he's going to give me an attack of the horrors," Mrs. Gainsborough whispered. "He's staring at me and twitching his nose like a hungry child at a jam roll. It's no good you telling me to give over. I can't help it. Look at his eyes. More like coal-cellars than eyes. I've never been able to abide being stared at since I sat down beside a wax-work at Louis Tussaud's and asked it where the ladies' cloak-room was."

"He amuses me," Sylvia said. "What are you going to have?"

"Well, I *was* going to have a grenadier, but really if that skelington opposite is going to look at me all night, I think I'll take something stronger."

"Try a cuirassier," Sylvia suggested.

"Whatever's that?"

"It's the same relation to a curaçao that a grenadier is to a grenadine."

"What I should really like is a nice little drop of whisky with a little tiddley bit of lemon; but there, I've noticed if you ask for whisky in Paris it causes a regular commotion. The waiter holds the bottle as if it was going to bite him, and the proprietor winks at him he's pouring out too much, and I can't abide those blue siphons. Sells they call them, and sells they are."

"I shall order you a bock in a moment," Sylvia threatened.

"Now don't be unkind just because I made a slight complaint about being stared at. Perhaps they won't make such a bother if I *do* have a little whisky. But there, I can't resist it. It's got a regular taste of London, whisky has."

The man at the table leaned over suddenly and asked, in a tense voice:

"Scotch or Irish?"

"Oh, good land! what a turn you gave me! I couldn't have jumped more," Mrs. Gainsborough exclaimed, "not if one of the lions in Trafalgar Square had said pip-ip as I passed!"

"You didn't think I was English, did you?" said the stranger. "I forget it myself sometimes. I'm a terrible warning to the world. I'm a pose that's become a reality."

"Pose?" Mrs. Gainsborough echoed. "Oh, I didn't understand you for the moment. You mean you're an artist's model?"

The stranger turned his eyes upon Sylvia, and, whether from sympathy or curiosity, she made friends with him, so that when they were ready to go home the eccentric Englishman, whom every one called Milord and who did not offer any alternative name to his new friends, said he would walk with them a bit of the way, much to Mrs. Gainsborough's embarrassment.

"I'm the first of the English decadents," he proclaimed to Sylvia. "Twenty years ago I came to Paris to study art. I hadn't a penny to spend on drugs. I hadn't enough money to lead a life of sin. There's a tragedy! For five years I starved myself instead. I thought I should make myself interesting. I did. I became a figure. I learned the raptures of hunger. Nothing surpasses them—opium, morphine, ether, cocaine, hemp. What are they beside hunger? Have you got any coco with you? Just a little pinch? No? Never mind. I don't really like it. Not really. Some people like it, though. Who's the old woman with you? A procuress? Last night I had a dream in which I proved the non-existence of God by the least common multiple. I can't exactly remember how I did it now. That's why I was so worried this evening; I can't remember if the figures were two, four, sixteen, and thirty-eight. I worked it out last night in my dream. I obtained a view of the universe as a geometrical abstraction. It's perfectly simple, but I cannot get it right now. There's a crack in my ceiling which indicates the way. Unless I can walk along that crack I can't reach the center of the universe, and of course it's hopeless to try to obtain a view of the universe as a geometrical abstraction if one can't reach the center. I take it you agree with me on that point. That point! Wait a minute. I'm almost there."

That point. Don't let me forget. That point. That is the point. Ah!"

The abstraction eluded him and he groaned aloud.

"The more I listen to him," said Mrs. Gainsborough, "the more certain sure I am he ought to see a doctor."

"I must say good night," the stranger murmured, sadly. "I see that I must start again at the beginning of that crack in my ceiling. I was lucky to find the room that had such a crack, though in a way it's rather a nuisance. It branches off so, and I very often lose the direction. There's one particular branch that always leads away from the point. I'm afraid to do anything about it in the morning. Of course, I might put up a notice to say, *this is the wrong way*; but supposing it were really the right way? It's a great responsibility to own such a crack. Sometimes I almost go mad with the burden of responsibility. Why, by playing about with that ceiling when my brain isn't perfectly clear I might upset the whole universe! We'll meet again one night at the Chouette. I think I'll cross the boulevard now. There's no traffic, and I have to take a certain course not to confuse my line of thought."

The eccentric stranger left them and, crossing the road in a series of diagonal tacks, disappeared.

"Coco," said Sylvia.

"Cocoa?" echoed Mrs. Gainsborough. "Brandy, more like."

"Or hashish."

"Ashes? Well, I had a fox-terrier once that died in convulsions from eating coke, so perhaps it is ashes."

"We must meet him again," said Sylvia. "These queer people outside ordinary life interest me."

"Well, it's interesting to visit a hospital," Mrs. Gainsborough agreed. "But that doesn't say you want to go twice. Once is enough for that fellow, to my thinking. He's interesting, but uncomfortable, like the top of a 'bus.'"

Sylvia, however, was determined to pursue her acquaintance with the outcast Englishman. She soon discovered that for years he had been taking drugs and that nothing but drugs had brought him to his present state of abject buffoonery. Shortly before he became friends with Sylvia he had been taken up as a week's amusement by some young men who were under the impression that they were seeing Parisian life in his company. They had been generous to him, and latterly he had been able to drug himself as much as he wanted. The result had been to hasten his supreme collapse. Even in his last illness he would not talk to Sylvia about his youth before he came to Paris, and in the end she was inclined to accept him at his own estimate, a pose that was become a reality.

One evening he seemed more haggard than usual and talked much less; by the twitching of his nostrils, he had been dosing himself hard with cocaine. Suddenly, he stretched his thin hand across the marble table and seized hers feverishly:

"Tell me," he asked. "Are you sorry for me?"

"I think it's an impertinence to be sorry for anybody," she answered. "But if you mean do I wish you well, why, yes, old son, I wish you very well."

"What I told you once about my coming to Paris to work at art was all lies. I came here because I had to leave nothing else behind, not even a name. You said, one evening when we were arguing about ambition, that if you could only find your line you might do something on the stage. Why don't you recite my poems? Read them through. One or two are in English, but most of them are in French. They are really more sighs than poems. They require no acting. They want just a voice."

He undid the leather strap that supported his satchel and handed it to Sylvia.

"To-morrow," he said, "if I'm still alive, I'll come here and find out what you think of them. But you've no idea how threatening that 'if' is. It gets longer and longer. I can't see the end if it anywhere. It was very long last night. The dot of the 'i' was already out of sight. It's the longest 'if' that was ever imagined."

He rose hurriedly and left the café; Sylvia never saw him again.

The poems of this strange and unhappy creature formed a record of many years' slow debasement. Many of them seemed to her too personal and too poignant to be repeated aloud, almost even to be read to oneself. There was nothing, indeed, to do but burn them, that no one else might comprehend a man's degradation. Some of the poems, however, were objective, and in their complete absence of any effort to impress or rend or horrify they seemed not so much poems as actual glimpses into human hearts. Nor was that a satisfactory definition, for there was no attempt to explain any of the people described in these poems; they were ordinary people of the streets that lived in a few lines. This could only be said of the poems written in French; those in English seemed to her not very remarkable. She wondered if perhaps the less familiar tongue had exacted from him an achievement that was largely fortuitous.

"I've got an idea for a show," Sylvia said to Mrs. Gainsborough. "One or two old folk-songs, and then one of these poems half sung, half recited to an improvised accompaniment. Not more than one each evening."

Sylvia was convinced of her ability to make a success, and spent a couple of weeks in searching for the folk-songs she required.

Lily and Hector came back in the middle of this new idea, and Hector was sure that Sylvia would be successful. She felt that he was too well pleased with himself at the moment not to be uncritically content with the rest of the world, but he was useful to Sylvia in securing an *audition* for her. The agent was convinced of the inevitable failure of Sylvia's performance with the public, and said he thought it was a pity to waste such real talent on antique rubbish like the songs she had chosen. As for the poems, they were no doubt all very well in their way; he was not going to say he had not been able to listen to them, but the public did not expect that kind of thing. He did not wish to discourage a friend of M. Ozanne; he had by him the rights for what would be three of the most popular songs in Europe, if they were well sung. Sylvia read them through and then sang them. The agent was delighted. She knew he was really pleased because he gave up referring to her as a friend of M. Ozanne and addressed her directly. Hector advised her to begin with the ordinary stuff, and when she was well known enough to experiment upon the public with her own ideas. Sylvia, who was feeling the need to do something at once, decided to risk an audition at one of the outlying music-halls. She herself declared that the songs were so good in their own way that she could not help making a hit, but the others insisted that the triumph belonged to her.

"*Vous avez vraiment de l'espièglerie*," said Hector.

"You really were awfully jolly," said Lily.



"I didn't understand a word, of course," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "But you looked that wicked—well, really—I thoroughly enjoyed myself."

During the autumn Sylvia had secured engagements in music-halls of the *quartier*, but the agent advised her to take a tour before she ventured to attack the real Paris. It seemed to her a good way of passing the winter. Lily and Hector were very much together, and though Hector was always anxious for Sylvia to make a third, she found that the kind of amusement that appealed to him was much the same as that which had appealed to the young men who frequented Half Moon Street. It was a life of going to races, at which Hector would pass ladies without saluting or being saluted, who, he informed Sylvia and Lily afterward, were his aunts or his cousins, and actually on one occasion his mother. Sylvia began to feel the strain of being in the demi-monde but not of it; it was an existence that suited Lily perfectly, who could not understand why Sylvia should rail at their seclusion from the world. Mrs. Gainsborough began to grow restless for the peace of Mulberry Cottage and the safety of her furniture.

"You never know what will happen. I had a friend once—a Mrs. Beardmore. She was housekeeper to two maiden ladies in Portman Square—well, housekeeper, she was more of a companion because one of them was stone deaf. One summer they went away to Scarborough, and when they came back some burglars had brought a furniture-van three days running and emptied the whole house, all but the bell-pulls. Drove back, they did, from King's Cross in a four-wheeler, and the first thing they saw was a large board up—TO BE LET OR SOLD. A fine how-de-do there was in Portman Square, I can tell you; and the sister that was deaf had left her ear-trumpet in the train and nobody couldn't explain to her what had happened."

So Mrs. Gainsborough, whose fears had been heightened by the repetition of this tale, went back to London with what she described as a collection of vulgarities for Mrs. Marsham. Sylvia went away on tour.

Sylvia found the life of a music-hall singer on tour very solitary. Her fellow-vagabonds were so much more essentially mountebanks than in England, and so far away from normal existence, that even when she traveled in company because her next town coincided with the next town of other players, she was never able to identify herself with them, as in England she had managed to identify herself with the other members of the chorus. She found that it paid her best to be English, and to affect in her songs an almost excessive English accent. She rather resented the exploitation of her nationality, because it seemed to her the same kind of appeal that would have been made by a double-headed woman or a performing seal. Nobody wanted her songs to be well rendered so much as unusually rendered; everybody wanted to be surprised by her ability to sing at all in French. But if the audiences wished her to be English, she found that being English off the stage was a disadvantage among these continental mountebanks. Sylvia discovered the existence of a universal prejudice against English actresses, partly on account of their alleged personal uncleanness, partly on account of their alleged insincerity. On several occasions astonishment was expressed at the trouble she took with her hair and at her capacity for being a good *copaine*; when, later on, it would transpire that she was half French, everybody would find almost with relief an explanation of her apparent unconformity to rule.

Sylvia grew very weary of the monotonous life in which everybody's interest was bounded by the psychology of an audience. Interest in the individual never extended beyond the question of whether she would or would not, if she were a woman; of whether he desired or did not desire, if he were a man. When either of these questions was answered the interest reverted to the audience. It seemed maddeningly unimportant to Sylvia that the audience on Monday night should have failed to appreciate a point which the audience of Tuesday night would probably hail with enthusiasm; yet often she had to admit to herself that it was just her own inability or unwillingness to treat an audience as an individual that prevented her from gaining real success. She decided that every interpretative artist must pander his emotion, his humor, his wit, his movements nightly, and that somehow he must charm each audience into the complacency with which a sophisticated libertine seeks an admission of enduring love from the woman he has paid to satisfy a momentary desire. Assuredly the most successful performers in the grand style were those who could conceal even from the most intelligent audiences their professional relation to them. A performer of acknowledged reputation would not play to the gallery with battered wiles and manifest allurements, but it was unquestionable that the foundation of success was playing to the gallery, and that the third-rate performer who flattered these provincial audiences with the personal relation could gain louder applause than Sylvia, who wanted no audience but herself. It was significant how a word of *argot* that meant a fraud of apparent brilliancy executed by an artist upon the public had extended itself into daily use. Everything was *chic*. It was *chic* to wear a hat of the latest fashion; it was *chic* to impress one's lover by a jealous outburst; it was *chic* to refuse a man one's favors. Everything was *chic*: it was impossible to think or act or speak in this world of vagabonds without *chic*.

The individualistic life that Sylvia had always led both in private and in public seemed to her, notwithstanding the various disasters of her career, infinitely worthier than this dependency upon the herd that found its most obvious expression in the theater. It was revolting to witness human nature's lust for the unexceptionable or its cruel pleasure in the exception. Yet now, looking back at her past, she could see that it had always been her unwillingness to conform that had kept her apart from so much human enjoyment and human gain, though equally she might claim apart from human sorrow and human loss.

"The struggle, of course, would be terrible for a long while," Sylvia said to herself, "if everybody renounced entirely any kind of co-operation or interference with or imitation of or help from anybody else, but out of that struggle might arise the true immortals. A cat with a complete personality is surely higher than a man with an incomplete personality. Anyway, it's quite certain that this *cabotinage* is for me impossible. I believe that if I pricked a vein sawdust would trickle out of me now."

In such a mood of cheated hope did Sylvia return to Paris in the early spring; she was about to comment on Lily's usual state of molluscry, by yielding to which in abandoning the will she had lost the power to develop, when Lily herself proceeded to surprise her.

The affection between Hector and Lily had apparently made a steady growth and had floated in an undisturbed and equable depth of water for so long that Lily, like an ambitious water-lily, began to be ambitious of becoming a terrestrial plant. While for nearly a year she had been blossoming apparently without regard for anything but the beauty of the moment, she had all the time been sending out long roots beneath the water, long roots that were growing more and more deeply into the warm and respectable mud.

"You mean you'd like to marry Hector?" Sylvia asked.

"Why, yes, I think I should, rather. I'm getting tired of never being settled."

"But does he want to marry you?"

"We've talked about it often. He hates the idea of not marrying me."

"He'd like to go away with you and live on the top of a mountain remote from mankind, or upon a coral island in the Pacific with nothing but the sound of the surf and the cocoanuts dropping idly one by one, wouldn't he?"

"Well, he did say he wished we could go away somewhere all alone. How did you guess? How clever you are, Sylvia!" Lily exclaimed, opening wide her deep-blue eyes.

"My dear girl, when a man knows that it's impossible to be married either because he's married already or for any other reason, he always hymns a solitude for two. You never heard any man with serious intentions propose to live with his bride-elect in an Alpine hut or under a lonely palm. The man with serious intentions tries to reconcile his purse, not his person, with poetic aspirations. He's in a quandary between Hampstead and Kensington, not between mountain-tops and lagoons. I suppose he has also talked of a dream-child—a fairy miniature of his Lily?" Sylvia went on.

"We have talked about a baby," Lily admitted.

"The man with serious intentions talks about the aspect of the nursery and makes reluctant plans to yield, if compelled to, the room he had chosen for his study."

"You make fun of everything," Lily murmured, rather sulkily.

"But, my dear," Sylvia argued, "for me to be able to reproduce Hector's dream so accurately proves that I'm building to the type. I'll speculate further. I'm sure he has regretted the irregular union and vowed that, had he but known at first what an angel of purity you were, he would have died rather than propose it."

Lily sat silent, frowning. Presently she jumped up, and the sudden activity of movement brought home to Sylvia more than anything else the change in her.

"If you promise not to laugh, here are his letters," Lily said, flinging into Sylvia's lap a bundle tied up with ribbon.

"Letters!" Sylvia snapped. "Who cares about letters? The love-letters of a successful lover have no value. When he has something to write that he cannot say to your face, then I'll read his letter. All public blandishments shock me."

Hector was called away from Paris to go and stay with his mother at Aix-les-Bains; for a fortnight two letters arrived every day.

"The snow in Savoy will melt early this year," Sylvia mocked. "It's lucky he's not staying at St.-Moritz. Winter sports could never survive such a furnace."

Then followed a week's silence.

"The Alpine Club must have protested," Sylvia mocked. "Avalanches are not expected in March."

"He's probably motoring with his mother," Lily explained.

The next day a letter arrived from Hector.

HOTEL SUPERBE,  
AIX-LES-BAINS.

MY DEAR LILY,—I do not know how to express myself. You have known always the great difficulties of my position opposite to my mother. She has found that I owe to marry myself, and I have demanded the hand of Mademoiselle Arpenteur-Legage. I dare not ask your pardon, but I have written to make an arrangement for you, and from now please use the apartment which has for me memories the most sacred. It is useless to fight against circumstances.

HECTOR.

"I think he might have used mourning paper," Sylvia said. "They always have plenty at health resorts."

"Don't be so unkind, Sylvia," Lily cried. "How can you be so unkind, when you see that my heart is broken?" She burst into tears.

In a moment Sylvia was on her knees beside her.

"Lily, my dearest Lily, you did not really love him? Oh no, my dear, not really. If you really loved him, I'll go now to Aix myself and arrange matters over the head of his stuffy old mother. But you didn't really love him. You're simply upset at the breaking of a habit. Oh, my dear, you couldn't really have loved him!"

"He sha'n't marry this girl," Lily declared, standing up in a rage. "I'll go to Aix-les-Bains myself and I'll see this Mademoiselle." She snatched the letter from the floor to read the odious name of her rival. "I'll send her all his letters. You mightn't want to read them, but she'll want to read them. She'll read every word. She'll read how, when he was thinking of proposing to her, he was calling me his angel, his life, his soul, how he was—Oh, she'll read every word, and I'll send them to her by registered post, and then I'll know she gets them. How dare a Frenchman treat an English girl like that? How dare he? How dare he? French people think English girls have no passion. They think we're cold. Are we cold? We may not like being kissed all the time like French girls, but we're not cold. Oh, I feel I could kill him!"

Sylvia interrupted her rage.

"My dear, if all this fire and fury is because you're disappointed at not being married, twist him for fifty thousand francs, buy a silver casket, put his letters inside, and send them to him for a wedding-present with your good wishes. But if you love him, darling Lily, let me go and tell him the truth; if I think he's not worth it, then come away with me and be lonely with me somewhere. My beautiful thing, I can't promise you a coral island, but you shall have all my heart if you will."

"Love him?" echoed Lily. "I hate him. I despise him after this, but why should he marry her?"

"If you feel like that about him, I should have thought the best way to punish him would be to let the marriage proceed; to punish him further you've only to refuse yourself to him when he's married, for I'm quite sure that within six months he'll be writing to say what a mistake he made, how cold his wife is, and how much he longs to come back to you, *la jolie maîtresse de sa jeunesse, le souvenir du bon temps jadis*, and so on with the sentimental eternities of reconstructed passion."

"Live with him after he's married?" Lily exclaimed. "Why, I've never even kissed a married man! I should never forgive myself."

"You don't love him at all, do you?" Sylvia asked, pressing her hands down on Lily's shoulders and forcing her to look straight at her. "Laugh, my dear, laugh! Hurrah! you can't pretend you care a bit about him. Fifty thousand francs and freedom! And just when I was getting bored with Paris."

"It's all very well for you, Sylvia," Lily said, resentfully, as she tried to shake off Sylvia's exuberance. "You don't want to be married. I do. I really looked forward to marrying Michael."

Sylvia's face hardened.

"Oh, I know you blame me entirely for that," she continued. "But it wasn't my fault, really. It was bad luck. It's no good pretending I wasn't fond of Claude. I was, and when I met him—"

"Look here, don't let's live that episode over again in discussion," Sylvia said. "It belongs to the past, and I've always had a great objection to body-snatching."

"What I was going to explain," Lily went on, "was that Michael put the idea of marriage into my head. Then being always with Hector, I got used to being with somebody. I was always treated like a married woman when we went to the seaside or on motoring tours. You always think that because I sit still and say nothing my mind's an absolute blank, but it isn't. I've been thinking for a long time about marriage. After all, there must be something in marriage, or so many people wouldn't get married. You married the wrong man, but I don't believe you'll ever find the right man. You're much, much, much too critical. I *will* get married."

"And now," Sylvia said, with a laugh, "to all the other riddles that torment my poor brain I must add you."

Hector Ozanne tried to stanch Lily's wounded ideals with a generous compress of notes; he succeeded.

"After all," she admitted, twanging the elastic round the bundle. "I'm not so badly off."

"We must buy that silver casket for the letters," Sylvia said. "His wedding-day draws near. I think I shall dress up like the Ancient Mariner and give them to him myself."

"How much will a silver casket cost?" Lily asked.

Sylvia roughly estimated.

"It seems a good deal," said Lily, thoughtfully. "I think I shall just send them to him in a cardboard box. I finished those chocolates after dinner. Yes, that will do quite well. After all, he treated me very badly and to get his letters back safely will be quite a good-enough present. What could he do with a silver casket? He'd probably use it for visiting-cards."

That evening Sylvia, greatly content to have Lily to herself, again took her to the Café de la Chouette.

Her agent, who was drinking in a corner, came across to speak to her.

"Brazil?" she repeated, doubtfully.

"Thirty francs for three songs and you can go home at twelve. It isn't as if you had to sit drinking champagne and dancing all night."

Sylvia looked at Lily.

"Would you like a voyage?"

"We might as well go."

The contract was arranged.

## CHAPTER XI

ONE of the habits that Sylvia had acquired on tour in France was card-playing; perhaps she inherited her skill from Henry, for she was a very good player. The game on the voyage was poker. Before they were through the Straits of Gibraltar Sylvia had lost five hundred francs; she borrowed five hundred francs from Lily and set herself to win them back. The sea became very rough in the Atlantic; all the passengers were seasick. The other four poker-players, who were theatrical folk, wanted to stop, but Sylvia would not hear of it; she was much too anxious about her five hundred francs to feel seasick. She lost Lily's first five hundred francs and borrowed five hundred more. Lily began to feel less seasick now, and she watched the struggle with a personal interest. The other players, with the hope that Sylvia's bad luck would hold, were so deeply concentrated upon maintaining their advantage that they too forgot to be seasick. The ship rolled, but the poker-players only left the card-room for meals in the deserted saloon. Sylvia began to win again. Blue skies and calmer weather appeared; the other poker-players had no excuse for not continuing, especially now that it was possible to play on deck. Sylvia had won back all she had lost and two hundred francs besides when the ship entered the harbor of Rio de Janeiro.

"I think I should like gambling," Lily said, "if only one didn't have to shuffle and cut all the time."

The place where Sylvia was engaged to sing was one of those centers of aggregated amusement that exist all over the world without any particular characteristic to distinguish one from another, like the dinners in what are known as first-class hotels on the Continent. Everything here was more expensive than in Europe; even the roulette-boards had zero and double zero to help the bank. The tradition of Brazil for supplying gold and diamonds to the world had bred a familiarity with the external signs of wealth that expressed itself in overjeweled men and women, whose display one forgave more easily on account of the natural splendor of the scene with which they had to compete.

Lily, with the unerring bad taste that nearly always is to be found in sensuous and indolent women, to whom the obvious makes the quickest and easiest appeal, admired the flashing stones and stars and fireflies with an energy that astonished Sylvia, notwithstanding the novel glimpse she had been given of Lily's character in the affair with Hector Ozanne. The climate was hot, but a sea breeze freshened the city after sunset; the enforced day-long inactivity, with the luxurious cool baths and competent negresses who attended upon her lightest movement, satisfied Lily's conception of existence, and when they drove along the margin of the bay before dinner her only complaint was that she could not coruscate like other women in the carriages they passed.

With the money they had in hand Sylvia felt justified in avoiding a *pension d'artistes*, and they had taken a flat

together. This meant that when Sylvia went to work at the cabaret, Lily, unless she came with her, was left alone, which did not at all suit her. Sylvia therefore suggested that she should accept an engagement to dance at midnight, with the stipulation that she should not be compelled to stay until 3 A.M. unless she wanted to, and that by foregoing any salary she should not be expected to drink gooseberry wine at 8,000 reis a bottle, on which she would receive a commission of 1,000 reis. The management knew what a charm the tall, fair English girl would exercise over the swart Brazilians, and was glad enough to engage her at her own terms. Sylvia had not counted upon Lily's enjoying the cabaret life so much. The heat was affecting her much more than Lily, and she began to complain of the long hours of what for her was a so false gaiety. Nothing, however, would persuade Lily to go home before three o'clock at the earliest, and Sylvia, on whom a great lassitude and indifference had settled, used to wait for her, sitting alone while Lily danced the *machiche*.

One night, when Sylvia had sung two of her songs with such a sense of hopeless depression weighing her down that the applause which followed each of them seemed to her a mockery, she had a sudden vertigo from which she pulled herself together with a conviction that nothing would induce her to sing the third song. She went on the scene, seated herself at the piano, and to the astonishment and discomfort of the audience and her fellow-players, half chanted, half recited one of the eccentric Englishman's poems about a body in the morgue. Such a performance in such a place created consternation, but in the silence that followed Sylvia fainted. When she came to herself she was back in her own bedroom, with a Brazilian doctor jabbering and mouthing over her symptoms. Presently she was taken to a clinic and, when she was well enough to know what had happened, she learned that she had yellow fever, but that the crisis had passed. At first Lily came to see her every day, but when convalescence was further advanced she gave up coming, which worried Sylvia intensely and hampered her progress. She insisted that something terrible had happened to Lily and worked herself up into such a state that the doctor feared a relapse. She was too weak to walk; realizing at last that the only way of escaping from the clinic would be to get well, she fought against her apprehensions for Lily's safety and after a fortnight of repressed torments was allowed out. When Sylvia reached the flat she was met by the grinning negresses, who told her that Lily had gone to live elsewhere and let her understand that it was with a man.

Sylvia was not nearly well enough to reappear at the cabaret, but she went down that evening and was told by the other girls that Lily was at the tables. They were duly shocked at Sylvia's altered appearance, congratulated her upon having been lucky enough to escape the necessity of shaving her head, and expressed their regrets at not knowing in which clinic she had been staying so that they might have brought her the news of their world. Sylvia lacked the energy to resent their hypocrisy and went to look for Lily, whom she found blazing with jewels at one of the roulette-tables.

There was something so fantastic in Lily's appearance, thus bedecked, that Sylvia thought for a moment it was a feverish vision such as had haunted her brain at the beginning of the illness. Lily wore suspended from a fine chain round her neck a large diamond, one of those so-called blue diamonds of Brazil that in the moonlight seem like sapphires; her fingers flashed fire; a large brooch of rubies in the likeness of a butterfly winked somberly from her black corsage.

Sylvia made her way through the press of gamblers and touched Lily's arm. So intent was she upon the tables that she brushed away the hand as if it had been a mosquito.

"Lily! Lily!" Sylvia called, sharply. "Where have you been? Where have you gone?"

At that moment the wheel stopped, and the croupier cried the number and the color in all their combinations. Sylvia was sure that he exchanged glances with Lily and that the gold piece upon the 33 on which he was paying had not been there before the wheel had stopped.

"Lily! Lily! Where have you been?" Sylvia called, again. Lily gathered in her winnings and turned round. It was curious how changed her eyes were; they seemed now merely like two more rich jewels that she was wearing.

"I'm sorry I've not been to see you," she said. "My dear, I've won nearly four thousand pounds."

"You have, have you?" Sylvia said. "Then the sooner you leave Brazil the better."

Lily threw a swift glance of alarm toward the croupier, a man of almost unnatural thinness, who, while he intoned the invitation to place the stakes, fixed his eyes upon her.

"I can't leave Brazil," she said, in a whisper. "I'm living with him."

"Living with a croupier?" Sylvia gasped.

"Hush! He belongs to quite a good family. He ruined himself. His name is Manuel Camacho. Don't talk to me any more, Sylvia. Go away. He's madly jealous. He wants to marry me."

"Like Hector, I suppose," Sylvia scoffed.

"Not a bit like Hector. He brings a priest every morning and says he'll kill me and himself and the priest, too, if I don't marry him. But I want to make more money, and then I will marry him. I must. I'm afraid of what he'll do if I refuse. Go away from me, Sylvia, go away. There'll be a fearful scene to-night if you will go on talking to me. Last night a man threw a flower into our carriage when we were driving home, and Manuel jumped out and beat him insensible with his cane. Go away."

Sylvia demanded where she was living, but Lily would not tell her, because she was afraid of what her lover might do.

"He doesn't even let me look out of the window. If I look out of the window he tears his clothes with rage and digs his finger-nails into the palms of his hands. He's very violent. Sometimes he shoots at the chandelier."

Sylvia began to laugh. There was something ridiculous in the notion of Lily's leading this kind of lion-tamer's existence. Suddenly the croupier with an angry movement swept a pile of money from the table.

"Go away, Sylvia, go away. I know he'll break out in a moment. That was meant for a warning."

Sylvia understood that it was hopeless to persist for the moment, and she made her way back to the cabaret. The girls were eager to know what she thought of Lily's protector.

*"Elle a de la veine, tu sais, la petite Lili. Elle l'a pris comme ça, et il l'aime à la folie. Et elle gagne! mon Dieu, comme elle gagne! Tout va pour elle. Tu sais, elle a des brillants merveilleux. Ça fait riche, tu sais. Y'a pas de chic, mais il est jaloux! Il se porte comme un fou. Ça me raserait, tu sais, être collée avec un homme pareil. Pourtant, elle est business, la petite Lili! Elle ne lui donne pas un rond. Y'a pas de dos vert. Ah, non, elle est la vraie anglaise sans*

*blague. Et le mec, dis, n'est-ce pas qu'il est maigre comme tout? On dirait un squelette."*

With all their depreciation of the croupier, it seemed to Sylvia that most of the girls would have been well pleased to change places with Lily. But how was she herself to regard the affair? During those long days of illness, when she had lain hour after hour with her thoughts, to what a failure her life had seemed to be turning, and what a haphazard, harborless course hers had seemed to be. Now she must perhaps jettison the little cargo she carried, or would it be fairer to say that she must decide whether she should disembark it? It was absurd to pretend that Michael would have viewed with anything but dismay the surrender of Lily to such a one as that croupier, and if she made that surrender, she would be violating his trust that counted for so much in her aimless career. Yet was she not attributing to Michael the sentiment he felt before Lily's betrayal of him? He had only demanded of Sylvia that she should prevent Lily from drifting downward along the dull road of undistinguished ruin. If this fantastic Brazilian wished to marry her, why should he not do so? Then she herself should be alone indeed and, unless a miracle happened, should be lost in the eternal whirl of vagabonds to and fro across the face of the earth.

"They say one must expect to be depressed after yellow fever," Sylvia reassured herself. "Perhaps this mood won't last, but, oh, the endlessness of it all! How even one's brush and comb seem weighed down by an interminable melancholy. As I look round me I can see nothing that doesn't strike me as hopelessly, drearily, appallingly superfluous. The very soap in its china dish looks wistful. How pathetic the life of a piece of soap is, when one stops to contemplate it. A slow and steady diminution. Oh, I must do something to shake off this intolerable heaviness!"

The simplest and most direct path to energy and action seemed to be an attempt to interview Camacho, and the following evening Sylvia tried to make Lily divulge her address; but she begged not to be disturbed, and Sylvia, seeing that she was utterly absorbed by the play, had to leave her.

"Either I am getting flaccid beyond belief," she said to herself, "or Lily has acquired an equally incredible determination. I think it's the latter. It just shows what passion will do even for a Lily. All her life she has remained unmoved, until roulette reveals itself to her and she finds out what she was intended for. Of course I must leave her to her fierce skeleton; he represents the corollary to the passion. Queer thing, the way she always wins. I'm sure they're cheating, somehow, the two of them. There's the final link. They'll go away presently to Europe, and Lily will enjoy the sweetest respectability that exists—the one that is founded on early indiscretion and dishonesty—a paradise preceded by the fall."

Sylvia waited by the entrance to the roulette-room on the next night until play was finished, watched Lily come out with Camacho, and saw them get into a carriage and drive away immediately. None of the attendants or the other croupiers knew where Camacho lived, or, if they knew, they refused to tell Sylvia. On the fourth evening, therefore, she waited in a carriage by the entrance and ordered her driver to follow the one in which Lily was. She found that Camacho's apartments were not so far from her own; the next morning she waited at the corner of the street until she saw him come out; then she rang the bell. The negress who opened the door shook her head at the notion of letting Sylvia enter, but the waiting in the sun had irritated her and she pushed past and ran up-stairs. The negress had left the upper door open, and Sylvia was able to enter the flat. Lily was in bed, playing with her jewels as if they were toys.

"Sylvia!" she cried, in alarm. "He'll kill you if he finds you here. He's gone to fetch the priest. They'll be back in a moment. Go away."

Sylvia said she insisted on speaking to Camacho; she had some good advice to give him.

"But he's particularly jealous of you. The first evening you spoke to me ... look!" Lily pointed to the ceiling, which was marked like a die with five holes. "He did that when he came home to show what he would do to you."

"Rubbish!" said Sylvia. "He'll be like a lamb when we meet. If he hadn't fired at the ceiling I should have felt much more alarmed for the safety of my head."

"But, Sylvia," Lily entreated. "You don't know what he's like. Once, when he thought a man nudged me, he came home and tore all the towels to pieces with his teeth. The servant nearly cried when she saw the room in the morning. It was simply covered with bits of towel, and he swallowed one piece and nearly choked. You don't know what he's like. I can manage him, but nobody else could."

Here was a new Lily indeed, who dared to claim that she could manage somebody of whom Sylvia must be afraid. She challenged Lily to say when she had ever known her to flinch from an encounter with a man.

"But, my dear, Manuel isn't English. When he's in one of those rages he's not like a human being at all. You can't soothe him by arguing with him. You have to calm him without talking."

"What do you use? A red-hot poker?"

Lily became agitated at Sylvia's obstinacy, and, regardless of her jewels, which tinkled down into a heap on the floor, she jumped out of bed and implored her not to stay.

"I want to know one or two things before I go," Sylvia said, and was conscious of taking advantage of Lily's alarm to make her speak the truth, owing to the lack of time for the invention of lies.

"Do you love this man?"

"Yes, in a way I do."

"You could be happy married to him?"

"Yes, when I've won five thousand pounds."

"He cheats for you?"

Lily hesitated.

"Never mind," Sylvia went on. "I know he does."

"Oh, my dear," Lily murmured, biting her lip. "Then other people might notice. Never mind. I ought to finish to-night. The boat sails the day after to-morrow."

"And what about me?" Sylvia asked.

Lily looked shamefaced for a moment, but the natural optimism of the gambler quickly reasserted itself.

"I thought you wouldn't like to break your contract."

"My contract," Sylvia repeated, bitterly. "What about— Oh, but how foolish I am. You dear unimaginative creature!"

"I'm not at all unimaginative," Lily interposed, quickly. "One of the reasons why I want to leave Brazil is because the black people here make me nervous. That's why I left our flat. I didn't know what to do. I was so frightened. I think I'm very imaginative. You got ill. What was I to do?"

She asked this like an accusation, and Sylvia knew that it would be impossible to make her see any other point of view.

"Besides, it was your fault I started to gamble. I watched you on the boat."

"But you were going away without a word to me?" Sylvia could not refrain from tormenting herself with this question.

"Oh no, I was coming to say good-by, but you don't understand how closely he watches me."

The thought of Camacho's jealous antics recurred to Lily with the imminence of his return; she begged Sylvia, now that all her questions were answered, to escape. It was too late; there was a sound of footsteps upon the stairs and the noise of angry voices above deep gobbles of protested innocence from the black servant.

The entrance reminded Sylvia of "Il Barbieri di Siviglia," for when Camacho came leaping into the room, as thin and active as a grasshopper, the priest was holding his coattails with one hand and with the other making the most operatic gestures of despair, like Don Basilio. In the doorway the black servant continued to gobble at everybody in turn, including the Almighty, to witness the clarity of her conscience.

"What language do you speak?" Sylvia asked, sharply, while Camacho was struggling to free himself from the restraint of the priest.

"I speak English! Gaddam! Hell! Five hundred hells!" the croupier shouted. "And I have sworn a swear that you will not interrupt between me myself and my Lili."

Camacho raised his arm to shake his fist, and the priest caught hold of it, which made Camacho turn round and open on him with Portuguese expletives.

"When you've quite done cracking Brazil nuts with your teeth, perhaps you'll listen to me," Sylvia began.

"No, you hear me, no, no, no, no, no, no, no!" Camacho shouted. "And I will not hear you. I have heard you enough. You shall not take her away. *Putain!*"

"If you want to be polite in French," Sylvia said. "Come along!"

*"Ce marloupatte pâle et mince  
Se nommait simplement Navet,  
Mais il vivait ainsi qu'un prince,  
Il aimait les femmes qu'on rince.*

*Tu comprends? Mais moi, je ne suis pas une femme qu'on rince."*

It was certainly improbable, Sylvia thought, that the croupier had understood much of Richepin's verse, but the effect of the little recitation was excellent because it made him choke. Lily now intervened, and when Sylvia beheld her soothing the inarticulate Camacho by stroking his head, she abandoned the last faint inclination to break off this match and called upon the priest to marry them at once. No doubt the priest would have been willing to begin the ceremony if he had been able to understand a word of what Sylvia said, but he evidently thought she was appealing to him against Camacho's violence, and with a view to affording the ultimate assistance of which he was capable he crossed himself and turned up his eyes to heaven.

"What an awful noise there is!" Sylvia cried, and, looking round her with a sudden realization of its volume, she perceived that the negress in the doorway had been reinforced by what was presumably the cook—another negress who was joining in her fellow-servant's protestations. At the same time the priest was talking incessantly in rapid Portuguese; Camacho was probably swearing in the same language; and Lily was making a noise that was exactly half-way between a dove cooing and an ostler grooming a horse.

"Look here, Mr. Camacho," Sylvia began.

"Oh, don't speak to him, Sylvia," Lily implored. "He can't be spoken to when he's like this. It's a kind of illness, really."

Sylvia paid no attention to her, but continued to address the croupier.

"If you'll listen to me, Mr. Camacho, instead of behaving like an exasperated toy terrier, you'll find that we both want the same thing."

"You shall not have her," the croupier chattered. "I will shoot everybody before you shall have her."

"I don't want her," Sylvia screamed. "I've come here to be a bridesmaid or a godmother or any other human accessory to a wedding you like to mention. Take her, my dear man, she's yours."

At last Sylvia was able to persuade him that she was not to be regarded as an enemy of his matrimonial intentions, and after a final burst of rage directed against the negresses, whom he ejected from the room, as a housemaid turns a mattress, he made a speech:

"I am to marry Lily. We go to Portugal, where I am not to be a croupier, but a gentleman. I excuse my furage. You grant excusals, yes? It is a decomprehence."

"He's apologizing," Lily explained in the kind of way one might call attention to the tricks of an intelligent puppy.

"She's actually proud of him," Sylvia thought. "But, of course, to her he represents gold and diamonds."

The priest, who had grasped that the strain was being relaxed, began to exude smiles and to rub his hands; he sniffed the prospect of a fee so richly that one seemed to hear the notes crackle like pork. Camacho produced the wedding-ring that was even more outshone than wedding-rings usually are by the diamonds of betrothal.

"But I can't be married in my dressing-gown," Lily protested.

Sylvia felt inclined to say it was the most suitable garment, except a nightgown, that she could have chosen, but in the end, after another discussion, it was decided that the ecclesiastical ceremony should be performed to-morrow in church and that to-day should be devoted to the civil rite. Sylvia promised not to say a word about the departure to Europe.

Three days later Sylvia went on board the steamer to make her farewells. She gave Lily a delicate little pistol for a wedding-present; from Lily, in memory of her marriage, she received a box of chocolates.

It was impossible not to feel lonely, when Lily had gone: in three and a half years they had been much together. For a while Sylvia tried to content herself with the company of the girls in the *pension d'artistes*, to which she had been forced to go because the flat was too expensive for her to live in now. Her illness had swallowed up any money she had saved, and the manager took advantage of it to lower her salary. When she protested the manager told her he would be willing to pay the original salary, if she would go to São Paulo. Though Sylvia understood that the management was trying to get the best of a bargain, she was too listless to care much and she agreed to go. The voyage there was like a nightmare. The boat was full of gaudy negroes who sang endlessly their mysterious songs; the smell was vile; the food was worse; cockroaches swarmed. São Paulo was a squalid reproduction of Rio de Janeiro, and the women who sang in the cabaret were all seamed with ten years' longer vagabondage than those at Rio. The men of São Paulo treated them with the insolence of the half-breeds they all seemed. On the third night a big man with teeth like an ancient fence and a diamond in his shirt-front like a crystal stopper leaned over from a box and shouted to Sylvia to come up and join him when she had finished her songs; he said other things that made her shake with anger. When she left the scene, the grand pimp, who was politely known as the manager, congratulated Sylvia upon her luck: she had caught the fancy of the richest patron.

"You don't suppose I'm going to see that *goujat* in his box?" she growled.

The grand pimp was in despair. Did she wish to drive away their richest patron? He would probably open a dozen bottles of champagne. He might ... the grand pimp waved his arms to express mental inability to express all the splendors within her grasp. Presently the impatient suitor came behind the scene to know the reason of Sylvia's delay. He grasped her by the wrist and tried to drag her up to his box. She seized the only weapon in reach—a hand-glass—and smashed it against his face. The suitor roared; the grand pimp squealed; Sylvia escaped to the stage, which was almost flush with the main dancing-hall. She forced her way through the orchestra, kicking the instruments right and left, and fell into the arms of a man more resplendent than the rest, but a *rastaquouère* of more Parisian cut, who in a dago-American accent promised to plug the first guy that tried to touch her.

Sylvia felt like Carmen on the arm of the Toreador when she and her protector walked out of the cabaret. He was a youngish man, wearing a blue serge suit and high-heeled shoes half buckskin, half patent-leather, tied with white silk laces, so excessively American in shape that one looked twice to be sure he was not wearing them on the wrong feet. His trousers, after exhausting the ordinary number of buttons in front, prolonged themselves into a kind of corselet that drew attention to the slimness of his waist. He wore a frilled white shirt sown with blue hearts and a white silk tie with a large diamond pin. The back of his neck was shaved, which gave his curly black hair the look of a wig. He was the Latin dandy after being operated upon in an American barber shop, and his name was Carlos Morera.

Sylvia noted his appearance in such detail, because the appearance of anybody after that monster in the box would have come as a relief and a diversion. Morera had led her to a bar that opened out of the cabaret, and after placing two automatic pistols on the counter he ordered champagne cocktails for them both.

"He won't come after you in here. Dat stiff don't feel he would like to meet Carlos Morera. Say, do you know why? Why, because Carlos Morera's ready to plug any stiff dat don't happen to suit his fancy right away. Dat's me, Carlos Morera. I'm pretty rich, I am. I'm a gentleman, I am. But dat ain't going to stop me using those"; he indicated the pistols. "Drink up and let's have another. Don't you want to drink? See here, then." He poured Sylvia's cocktail on the floor. "Nothing won't stop Carlos Morera if he wants to call another round of drinks. Two more champagne cocktails!"

"Is this going to be my Manuel?" Sylvia asked herself. She felt at the moment inclined to let him be anything rather than go back to the concert and face that man in the box.

"You're looking some white," Morera commented. "I believe he scared you. I believe I ought to have shot him. Say, you sit here and drink up. I t'ink I'll go back and shoot him now. I sha'n't be gone long."

"Sit still, you fire-eater," cried Sylvia, catching hold of his arm.

"Say, dat's good. Fire-eater! Yes, I believe I'd eat fire if it came to it. I believe you could make me laugh. I'm going to Buenos Aires to-morrow. Why don't you come along of me? This São Paulo is a bum Brazilian town. You want to see the Argentine. I'll show you lots of life."

"Look here," said Sylvia. "I don't mind coming with you to make you laugh and to laugh myself, but that's all. Understand?"

"Dat's all right," Carlos agreed. "I'm a funny kind of a fellow, I am. As soon as I found I could buy any girl I wanted, I didn't seem to want them no more. Sides, I've got seven already. You come along of me. I'm good company, I am. Everybody dat goes along of me laughs and has good fun. Hear that?"

He jingled the money in his pocket with a joyful reverence, as if he were ringing a sanctus-bell. "Now, you come back with me into the cabaret."

Sylvia hesitated.

"Don't you worry. Nobody won't dare to look at you when you're with me."

Morera put her arm in his, and back they walked into the cabaret again, more than ever like Carmen with her Toreador. The grand pimp, seeing that Sylvia was safely protected, came forward with obeisances and apologies.

"See here. Bring two bottles of champagne," Morera commanded.

The grand pimp beckoned authoritatively to a waiter, but Morera stood up in a fury.

"I didn't tell you to bring a waiter. I told you to bring two bottles of champagne. Bring them yourself."

The grand pimp returned very meekly with the bottles.

"Dat's more like. Draw the cork of one."

The grand pimp asked if he should put the other on ice.

"Don't you worry about the other," said Morera. "The other's only there so I can break it on your damned head in case I get tired of looking at you. See what I mean?"

The grand pimp professed the most perfect comprehension.

"Well, this is a bum place," Morera declared, after they had sat for a while. "I believe we sha'n't get no fun here. Let's quit."

He drove her back to the pension, and the next day they took ship to La Plata for Buenos Aires.

Morera insisted on Sylvia's staying at an expensive hotel and was very anxious for her to buy plenty of new evening frocks.

"I've got a fancy," he explained, "to show you a bit of life. You hadn't seen life before you came to Argentina."

The change of air had made Sylvia feel much better, and when she had fitted herself out with new clothes, to which Morera added a variety of expensive and gaudy jewels, she felt quite ready to examine life under his guidance.

He took her to one or two theaters, to the opera, and to the casinos; then one evening he decided upon a special entertainment of which he made a secret.

"I want you to dress yourself up fine to-night," he said. "We're going to some smart ball. Put on all your jewelry. I'm going to dress up smart, too."

Sylvia had found that overdressing was the best way of returning his hospitality; this evening she determined to surpass all previous efforts.

"Heavens!" she ejaculated, when she made the final survey of herself in the looking-glass. "Do I look more like a Christmas tree or a chemist's shop?"

When she joined Morera in the lounge, she saw that he was in evening dress, with diamonds wherever it was possible to put them.

"You're fine," he said, contentedly. "Dat's the way I like to see a goil look. I guess we're going to have lots of fun to-night."

They drank a good deal of champagne at dinner, and about eleven o'clock went out to their carriage. When the coachman was given the address of the ballroom, he looked round in surprise and was sworn at for his insolence, so with a shrug of the shoulders he drove off. They left the ordinary centers of amusement behind them and entered a meaner quarter where half-breeds and negroes predominated; at last after a very long drive they pulled up before what looked like a third-rate saloon. Sylvia hesitated before she got out; it did not seem at all a suitable environment for their conspicuous attire.

"We shall have lots of fun," Morera promised. "This is the toughest dancing-saloon in Buenos Aires."

"It looks it," Sylvia agreed.

They entered a vestibule that smelt of sawdust, niggers, and raw spirits, and went up-stairs to a crowded hall that was thick with tobacco smoke and dust. A negro band was playing ragtime in a corner; all along one side of the hall ran a bar. The dancers were a queer medley. The men were mostly of the Parisian apache type, though naturally more swarthy; the women were mostly in black dresses, with shawls of brilliantly colored silk and tawdry combs in their black hair. There were one or two women dancing in coat and skirt and hat, whose lifted petticoats and pale, dissolute faces shocked even Sylvia's masculine tolerance; there was something positively evil in their commonplace attire and abandoned motion; they were like anemic shop-girls possessed with unclean spirits.

"I believe we shall make these folks mad," said Morera, with a happy chuckle. Before Sylvia could refuse he had taken her in his arms and was dancing round the room at double time. The cracked mirrors caught their reflections as they swept round, and Sylvia realized with a shock the amount of diamonds they were wearing between them and the effect they must be having in this thieves' kitchen.

"Some of these guys are looking mad already," Morera proclaimed, enthusiastically.

The dance came to an end, and they leaned back against the wall exhausted. Several men walked provocatively past, looking Sylvia and her partner slowly up and down.

"Come along of me," Morera said. "We'll promenade right around the hall."

He put her arm in his and swaggered up and down. The other dancers were gathering in knots and eyeing them menacingly. At last an enormous American slouched across the empty floor and stood in their path.

"Say, who the hell are you, anyway?" he asked.

"Say, what the hell's dat to you?" demanded Morera.

"Quit!" bellowed the American.

Morera fired without taking his hand from his pocket, and the American dropped.

"Hands up! *Manos arriba!*" cried Morera, pulling out his two pistols and covering the dancers while he backed with Sylvia toward the entrance. When they were up-stairs in the vestibule he told her to look if the carriage were at the door; when he heard that it was not he gave a loud whoop of exultation.

"I said I believed we was going to have lots of fun. We got to run now and see if any of those guys can catch us."

He seized Sylvia's arm, and they darted down the steps and out into the street. Morera looked rapidly right and left along the narrow thoroughfare. They could hear the noise of angry voices gathering in the vestibule of the saloon.

"This way and round the turning," he cried, pulling Sylvia to the left. There was only one window alight in the narrow alley up which they had turned, a dim orange stain in the darkness. Morera hammered on the door as their pursuers came running round the corner. Two or three shots were fired, but before they were within easy range the door had opened and they were inside. The old hag who had opened it protested when she saw Sylvia, but Morera commanded her in Spanish to bolt it, and she seemed afraid to disobey. Somewhere in a distant part of the house there was a sound of women's crooning; outside they could hear the shuffling of their pursuers' feet.

"Say, this is fun," Morera chuckled. "We've arrived into a *burdel!*"

It was impossible for Sylvia to be angry with him, so frank was he in his enjoyment of the situation. The old woman, however, was very angry indeed, for the pursuers were banging upon her door and she feared a visit from the police. Her clamor was silenced with a handful of notes.

"Champagne for the girls," Morera cried.

For Sylvia the evening had already taken on the nature of a dream, and she accepted the immediate experience as only one of an inconsequent procession of events. Having attained this state of mind, she saw nothing unusual in



sitting down with half a dozen women who clung to their sofas as sea-anemones to the rocks of an aquarium. She had a fleeting astonishment that they should have names, that beings so utterly indistinguishable should be called Juanilla or Belita or Tula or Lola or Maruca, but the faint shock of realizing a common humanity passed off almost at once, and she found herself enjoying a conversation with Belita, who spoke a few words of broken French. With the circulation of the champagne the women achieved a kind of liveliness and examined Sylvia's jewels with murmurs of admiration. The ancient bawd who owned them proposed a dance, to which Morera loudly agreed. The women whispered and giggled among themselves, looking bashfully over their shoulders at Sylvia in a way that made the crone thump her stick on the floor with rage. She explained in Spanish the cause of their hesitation.

"They don't want to take off their clothes in front of you," Morera translated to Sylvia, with apologies for such modesty from women who no longer had the right to possess even their own emotions; nevertheless, he suggested that they might be excused to avoid spoiling a jolly evening.

"Good heavens! I should think so!" Sylvia agreed.

Morera gave a magnanimous wave of his arm, in which he seemed to confer upon the women the right to keep on their clothes. They clapped their hands and laughed like children. Soon to the sound of castanets they wriggled their bodies in a way that was not so much suggestive of dancing as of flea-bites. A lamp with a tin reflector jarred fretfully upon a shelf, and the floor creaked.

Suddenly Morera held up his hand for silence. The knocking on the street door was getting louder. He asked the old woman if there was any way of getting out at the back.

"Dat's all right, kid," he told Sylvia. "We can crawl over the dooryards at the back. Dat door in front ain't going to hold not more than five minutes."

He tore the elastic from a bundle of notes and scattered them in the air like leaves; the women pounced upon the largesse and were fighting with one another on the floor when Sylvia and Morera followed the old woman to the back door and out into a squalid yard.

How they ever surmounted the various walls and crossed the various yards they encountered Sylvia could never understand. All she remembered was being lifted on packing-cases and dust-bins, of slipping once and crashing into a hen-coop, of tearing her dress on some broken glass, of riding astride walls and pricking her face against plants, and of repeating to herself all the time, "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed." When at last they extricated themselves from the maze of dooryards they wandered for a long time through a maze of narrow streets. Sylvia had managed to stuff all her jewelry out of sight into her corsage, where it scratched her most uncomfortably, but any discomfort was preferable to the covetous eyes of the half-breeds that watched her from the shadows.

"I guess you enjoyed yourself," said Morera, in a satisfied voice, when at last they found a carriage and leaned back to breathe the gentle night air.

"I enjoyed myself thoroughly," said Sylvia.

"Dat's the way to see a bit of life," he declared. "What's the good of sitting in a bum theater all the night? Dat don't amuse me any. I plugged him in the leg," he added, in a tone of almost tender reminiscence.

Sylvia expressed surprise at his knowing where he had hit him, and Morera was very indignant at the idea of her supposing that he should shoot a man without knowing exactly at what part of him he was aiming and where he should hit him.

"Why, I might have killed him dead," he added. "I didn't want to kill a man dead just for a bit of fun. I started them guys off, see. They thought they'd got a slob. Dat's where I was laughing. I guess I'll sleep good to-night."

Sylvia spent a month seeing life with Carlos Morera; though she never had another experience so exciting as the first, she passed a good deal of her time upon the verge of melodramatic adventure. She grew fond of this child-like creature with his spendthrift ostentation and bravado. He never showed the least sign of wanting to make love to her, and demanded nothing from Sylvia but overdressing and admiration of his exploits. At the end of the month he told Sylvia that business called him to New York and invited her to come with him. He let her understand, however, that now he wanted her as his mistress. Even if she could have tolerated the idea, Sylvia was sure that from the moment she accepted such a position he would begin to despise her. She had heard too many of his contemptuous references to the women he had bought. She refused to accompany him, on the plea of wanting to go back to Europe. Morera looked sullen, and she had a feeling that he was regretting the amount he had spent upon her. Her pride found such a sensation insupportable and she made haste to return him all his jewels.

"Say, what sort of a guy do you think I am?" He threw the jewels at her feet and left her like a spoiled child.

An hour or two later he came back with a necklace that must have cost five thousand dollars.

"Dat's the sort of guy I am," he said, and would take no refusal from her to accept it.

"You can't go on spending money for nothing like this," Sylvia protested.

"I got plenty, ha'n't I?" he asked.

She nodded.

"And I believe it's my money, ain't it?" he continued.

She nodded again.

"Well, dat finishes dat argument right away. Now I got another proposition. You listening? I got a proposition dat we get married. I believe I 'ain't met no girl like you. I know you've been a cabaret girl. Dat don't matter a cent to me. You're British. Well, I've always had a kind of notion I'd like to marry a British girl. Don't you tink I'm always the daffy guy you've bummed around with in Buenos Aires. You saw me in dat dancing-saloon? Well, I guess you know what I can do. Dat's what I am in business. Say, Sylvia, will you marry me?"

She shook her head.

"My dear old son, it wouldn't work for you or for me."

"I don't see how you figure dat out."

"I've figured it out to seventy times seven. It wouldn't do. Not for another mad month even. Come, let's say good-by. I want to go to Europe. I'm going to have a good time. It'll be you that's going to give it to me. My dear old Carlos, you may have spent your money badly from your point of view, but you haven't really. You never spent any money better in all your life."

Morera did not bother her any more. With all his exterior foolishness he had a very deep perception of individual humanity. There was a boat sailing for Marseilles in a day or two, and he bought a ticket for Sylvia.

"It's a return ticket," he told her. "It's good for a year."

She assured him that even if she came back it could never be to marry him, but he insisted upon her keeping it, and to please him she yielded.

Sylvia left the Argentine worth nearly as much as Lily when she went away from Brazil, and as if her luck was bent upon an even longer run, she gained heavily at poker all the way back across the Atlantic.

When she reached Marseilles, Sylvia conceived a longing to meet Valentine again, and she telegraphed to Elène at Brussels for her address. It was with a quite exceptional anticipation that Sylvia asked the *concierge* if Madame Lataille was in. While she walked up-stairs to her sister's apartment she remembered how she had yearned to be friends with Valentine nearly thirteen years ago, forgetting all about the disappointment of her hope in a sudden desire to fill up a small corner of her present loneliness.

Valentine had always lingered in Sylvia's imagination as a rather wild figure, headstrong to such a pitch where passion was concerned that she herself had always felt colorless and insignificant in comparison. There was something splendidly tropical about Valentine as she appeared to Sylvia's fancy; in all the years after she quitted France she had cherished a memory of Valentine's fiery anger on the night of her departure as something nobly independent.

Like other childish memories, Sylvia found Valentine much less impressive when she met her again—much less impressive, for instance, than Elène, who, though she had married a shopkeeper and had settled down to a most uncompromising and ordinary respectability, retained a ripening outward beauty that made up for any pinching of the spirit. Here was Valentine, scarcely even pretty, who achieved by neatness any effect of personality that she did. She had fine eyes—it seemed impossible for any of her mother's children to avoid them, however dull and inexpressive might have been the father's. Sylvia was thinking of Henry's eyes, but what she had heard of M. Lataille in childhood had never led her to picture him as more remarkable outwardly than her own father.

"Twelve years since we met," Valentine was murmuring, and Sylvia was agreeing and thinking to herself all the time how very much compressed Valentine was, not uncomfortably or displeasingly, but like a new dress before it has blossomed to the individuality of the wearer. There recurred to Sylvia out of the past a likeness between Valentine and Maudie Tilt when Maudie had dressed up for the supper-party with Jimmy Monkley.

When the first reckonings of lapsed years were over there did not seem much to talk about, but presently Sylvia described with much detail the voyage from La Plata to Marseilles, just as, when one takes up a long-interrupted correspondence, great attention is often devoted to the weather at the moment.

"*Alors, vous êtes chanteuse?*" Valentine asked.

"*Oui, je suis chanteuse,*" Sylvia replied.

Neither of the sisters used the second person singular: the conversation, which was desultory, like the conversation of travelers in a railway carriage, ended abruptly as if the train had entered a tunnel.

"*Vous êtes très-bien ici,*" said Sylvia, looking round. The train had emerged and was running through a dull cutting.

"*Oui, je suis très-bien ici,*" Valentine replied.

There was no hostility between the sisters; there was merely a blank, a sundering stretch of twelve years, that dismayed both of them with its tracklessness. Presently Sylvia noticed a photograph upon the wall so conspicuously framed as to justify a supposition that it represented the man who was responsible for Valentine's well-being.

"*Oui, c'est mon amant,*" said Valentine, in reply to the unspoken question.

Sylvia was faced by the problem of commenting satisfactorily upon a photograph. To begin with, it was one of those photographs that preserve the individual hairs of the mustache but eradicate every line from the face. It was impossible to comment on it, and it would have been equally impossible to comment on the original in person. The only fact emerging from the photograph was that in addition to a mustache the subject of it owned a pearl tie-pin; but even of the genuineness of the pearl it was unable to give any assurance.

"Photographs tell one nothing, do they?" Sylvia said, at last. "They're like somebody else's dreams."

Valentine knitted her brows in perplexity.

"Or somebody else's baby," Sylvia went on, desperately.

"I don't like babies," said Valentine.

"*Vraiment on est très-bien ici,*" said Sylvia.

She felt that by flinging an accentuated compliment to the room Valentine might feel her lover was included in the approbation.

"And it's mine," said Valentine, complacently. "He bought it for me. *C'est pour la vie.*"

Passion might be quenched in the slough of habitude; love's pinions might molt like any farm-yard hen's. What was that, when the apartment was hers for life?

"How many rooms have you?" Sylvia asked.

"Besides this one I have a bedroom, a dining-room, a kitchen, and a bath-room. Would you like to see the bath-room?"

When Valentine asked the last question she was transformed; a latent exultation flamed out from her immobility.

"I should love to see the bath-room," said Sylvia. "I think bath-rooms are often the most interesting part of a house."

"But this is an exceptional bath-room. It cost two thousand francs to install."

Valentine led the way to the admired chamber, to which a complicated arrangement of shining pipes gave an orchestral appearance. Valentine flitted from tap to tap. Aretino himself could scarcely have imagined more methods of sprinkling water upon the human body.

"And these pipes are for warming the towels," she explained. It was a relief to find pipes that led a

comparatively passive existence amid such a convolution of fountainous activity.

"I thought while I was about it that I would have the tiles laid right up to the ceiling," Valentine went on, pensively. "And you see, the ceiling is made of looking-glass. When the water is very hot, *ça fait drôle, tu sais, on ne se voit plus.*"

It was the first time she had used the second person singular; the bath-room had created in Valentine something that almost resembled humanity.

"Yes," Sylvia agreed. "I suppose that is the best way of making the ceiling useful."

"*C'est pour la vie,*" Valentine contentedly sighed.

"But if he were to marry?" Sylvia ventured.

"It would make no difference," Valentine answered. "I have saved money and with a bath-room like this one can always get a good rent. Everything in the apartment is mine, and the apartment is mine, too."

"*Alors, tu es contente?*" said Sylvia.

"*Oui, je suis contente,*" said Valentine.

"*Elle est jolie, ta salle de bain.*"

"*Oui, elle est jolie comme un amour,*" Valentine assented, with a sweet maternal smile.

They talked of the bath-room for a while when they came back to the boudoir; Sylvia was conscious of displaying the politeness with which one descends from the nursery at an afternoon call.

"*Enfin,*" said Sylvia, "*Je file.*"

"*Tu pars tout de suite de Marseilles?*"

"*Oui, je pars ce soir.*"

She had not really intended to leave Marseilles that evening, but there seemed no reason to stay.

"*C'est dommage que tu n'as pas vu Louis.*"

"*Il s'appelle Louis?*"

"*Oui, il s'appelle Louis. Il est à Lyon pour ses affaires.*"

"*Alors, au revoir, Valentine.*"

"*Au revoir, Sylvie.*"

They hesitated, both of them, to see which would offer her cheek first; in the end they managed to be simultaneous.

"Even the farewell was a stalemate," Sylvia said to herself on the way down-stairs.

She wondered, while she was walking back to her hotel, what was going to be the passion of her own life. One always started out with a dim conception of perfect love, however one might scoff at it openly in self-protection, but evidently it by no means followed that love for a man, let alone perfect love, would ever arrive. Lily had succeeded in inspiring at least one man with love for her, but she had found her own passion in roulette with Camacho tacked to it, inherited like a husband's servant, familiar with any caprice, but jealous and irritable. Valentine had found her grand passion in a bath-room that satisfied even her profoundest maternal instincts. Dorothy had loved a coronet with such fervor that she had been able to abandon everything that could smirch it. Sylvia's own mother had certainly found at thirty-four her grand passion, but Sylvia felt that it would be preferable to fall in love with a bath-room now than wait ten years for a Henry.

Sylvia reached the hotel, packed up her things, and set out to Paris without any definite plans in her head for the future, and just because she had no definite plans and nothing to keep her from sleeping, she could not sleep and tossed about on the *wagon-lit* half the night.

"It's not as if I hadn't got money. I'm amazingly lucky. It's really fantastic luck to find somebody like poor old Carlos to set me up for five years of luxurious independence. I suppose if I were wise I should buy a house in London—and yet I don't want to go back to London. The trouble with me is that, though I like to be independent, I don't like to be alone. Yet with Michael.... But what's the use of thinking about him? Do I actually miss him? No, certainly not. He's nothing more to me than something I might have had, but failed to secure. I'm regretting a missed experience. If one loses somebody like that, it leaves a sense of incompleteness. How often does one feel a quite poignant regret because one has forgotten to finish a cup of coffee; but the regret is always for the incomplete moment; it doesn't endure. Michael in a year will have changed; I've changed, also. There is nothing to suggest that if we met again now, we should meet in the same relation, with the same possibility in the background of our intercourse. Then why won't I go back to Mulberry Cottage? Obviously because I have out-lived Mulberry Cottage. I don't want to stop my course by running into a backwater that's already been explored. I want to go on and on until ... yes, until what? I can travel now, if I want to. Well, why shouldn't I travel? If I visit my agent in Paris—and I certainly shall visit him in order to tell him what I think of the management of that damned Casino at Rio—he'll offer me another contract to sing in some outlandish corner of the globe, and if I weren't temporarily independent, I should have to accept it with all its humiliations. Merely to travel would be a mistake I think. I've got myself into the swirl of mountebanks, and somehow I must continue with them. It's a poor little loyalty, but even that is better than nothing. Really, if one isn't tied down by poverty, one can have a very good time, traveling the world as a singer. Or I could live in Paris for a while. I should soon meet amusing people. Oh, I don't know what I want. I should rather like to get hold of Olive again. She may be married by now. She probably is married. She's bound to be married. A superfluity of romantic affection was rapidly accumulating that must have been deposited somewhere by now. I might get Gainsborough out from England to come with me. Come with me, where? It seems a shame to uproot the poor old thing again. She's nearly sixty. But I must have somebody."

When Sylvia reached Paris she visited two trunks that were in a repository. Among other things she took out the volume of Adlington's *Apuleius*.

"Yes, there's no doubt I'm still an ass," she said. "And since the Argentine really a golden ass; but oh, when, when, when shall I eat the rose-leaves and turn into Sylvia again? One might make a joke about that, as the White Knight said, something about Golden and Silver and Argentine."

Thinking of jokes reminded Sylvia of Mr. Pluepott, and thinking of Alice through the looking-glass brought back the Vicar. What a long way off they seemed.

"I can't let go of everybody," she cried. So she telegraphed and wrote urgently to Mrs. Gainsborough, begging her to join her in Paris. While she was waiting for a reply, she discussed projects for the future with her agent, who, when he found that she had some money, was anxious for her to invest a certain amount in the necessary *réclame* and appear at the Folies Bergères.

"But I don't want to make a success by singing French songs with an English accent," Sylvia protested. "I'd as soon make a success by singing without a roof to my mouth. You discouraged me from doing something I really wanted to do. All I want now is an excuse for roaming."

"What about a tour in Spain?" the agent suggested. "I can't get you more than ten francs a night, though, if you only want to sing. Still, Spain's much cheaper than America."

"*Mon cher ami, j'ai besoin du travail pour me distraire.* Ten francs is the wage of a slave, but pocket-money, if one is not a slave."

"*Vous avez de la veine, vous.*"

"*Vraiment?*"

"*Mais oui.*"

"*Peut-être quelqu'un m'a plaqué.*"

He tried to look grave and sympathetic.

"*Salaud,*" she mocked. "*Crois-tu que je t'en dirais. Bigre! je creverais plutôt.*"

She had dropped into familiarity of speech with him, but he, still hopeful of persuading her to intrust a profitable *réclame* to him, continued to treat her formally. Sylvia realized the *arrière pensée* and laughed at him.

"*Je ne suis pas encore en grande vedette, tu sais.*"

He assured her that such a triumph would ultimately come to her, and she scoffed.

"*Mon vieux, si je n'avais pas de la galette, je pourrais crever de faim devant ta porte. Ce que tu me dis, c'est du chic.*"

"Well, will you go to Spain?"

The contract was signed.

A day or two later, when she was beginning to give up hope of getting an answer from Mrs. Gainsborough, the old lady herself turned up at the hotel, looking not a minute older.

"You darling and daring old plesiosaurus," cried Sylvia, seizing her by the hand and twirling her round the vestibule.

"Yes, I am pleased to see you and no mistake," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "But what a tyrant! Well, really, I was in me bed when your telegram came and that boy he knocked like a tiger. Knock—knock! all the time I was trying to slip on me petticoat, which through me being in a regular fluster I put on wrong way up and got me feet all wound up with the strings. Knock—knock! 'Whatever do you think you're doing?' I said when at last I was fairly decent and went to open the door. 'Telegram,' he says, as saucy as brass. 'Telegram?' I said. 'I thought by the row you was making that you was building St. Paul's Cathedral.' 'Wait for the answer?' he said. 'Answer?' I said. 'Certainly not.' Well, there was I with your telegram in one hand and me petticoat slipping down in the other. Then on the top of that came your letter, and I couldn't resist a sight of you, my dearie. Fancy that Lily waltzing off like that. And with a Portuguese. She'll get Portuguese before he's finished with her. Portuguese is what she'll be. And the journey! Well, really, I don't know how I managed. I kept on saying, 'France,' the same as if I was asking a policeman the way to Oxford Circus, and they bundled me about like ... well, really, everybody was most kind. Still when I got to France, it wasn't much use going on shouting 'France' to everybody. However, I met a nice young fellow in the train, and he very thoughtfully assisted me into a cab and ... well, I am glad to see you."

"Now you're coming with me to Spain," Sylvia announced.

"Good land alive! Where?"

"Spain."

"Are you going chasing after Lily again?"

"No, we're going off on our own."

"Well, I may have started on the gad late in life, but I've certainly started now," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "Spain? That's where the Spanish flies come from, isn't it? Well, they ought to be lively enough, so I suppose we shall enjoy ourselves. And how do we get there?"

"By train!"

"Dear land! it's wonderful what they can do nowadays. What relation then is Spain to Portugal exactly? You must excuse my ignorance, Sylvia, but really I'm still all of a fluster. Fancy being bounced out of me bed into Spain. You really are a demon. Fancy you getting yellow fever. You haven't changed color much. Spain! Upon my word I never heard anything like it. We'd better take plenty with us to eat. I knew it reminded me of something. The Spanish Armada! I once heard a clergyman recite the Spanish Armada, though what it was all about I've completely forgotten. There was some fighting in it though. I went with the captain. Well, if he could see me now. You may be sure he's laughing, wherever he is. The idea of me going to Spain."

The idea materialized; that night they drove to the Gare d'Orléans.

## CHAPTER XII

THE journey to Madrid was for Mrs. Gainsborough a long revelation of human eccentricity.

"Not even Mrs. Ewings would believe it," she assured Sylvia. "It's got to be seen to be believed. I opened my mouth a bit wide when I first came to France, but France is Peckham Rye if you put it alongside of Spain. When that guard or whatever he calls himself opened our door and bobbed in out of the runnel with the train going full speed and asked for our tickets, you could have knocked me down with a feather. Showing off, that's what I call it. And carrying wine inside of goats! Disgusting I should say. Nice set-out there'd be in England if the brewers started

sending round beer inside of sheep. Why, it would cause a regular outcry; but these Spanish seem to put up with everything. I'm not surprised they come round selling water at every station. The cheek of it though, when you come to think about it. Putting wine inside of goats so as to make people buy water. If I'd have been an enterprising woman like Mrs. Marsham, I should have got out at the last station and complained to the police about it. But really the stations aren't fit for a decent person to walk about in. I'm not considered very particular, but when a station consists of nothing but a signal-box and a lavatory and no platform, I don't call it a station. And what a childish way of starting a train—blowing a toy horn like that. More like a school treat than a railway journey. And the turkeys! Now I ask you, Sylvia, would you believe it? Four turkeys under the seat and three on the rack over me head. A regular Harlequinade! And every time anybody takes out a cigarette or a bit of bread they offer it all around the compartment. Fortunately I don't look hungry, or they might have been offended. No wonder England's full of aliens. I shall explain the reason of it when I get home."

The place of entertainment where Sylvia worked was called the Teatro Japonés, for what reason it would have been difficult to say. The girls were, as usual, mostly French, but there were one or two Spanish dancers that, as Mrs. Gainsborough put it, kept one "rum-tum-tumming in one's seat all the time it was going on." Sylvia found Madrid a dull city entirely without romance of aspect, nor did the pictures in the Prado make up for the bull-ring's wintry desolation. Mrs. Gainsborough considered the most remarkable evidence of Spanish eccentricity was the way in which flocks of turkeys, after traveling in passenger-trains, actually wandered about the chief thoroughfares.

"Suppose if I was to go shooing across Piccadilly with a herd of chickens, let alone turkeys, well, it *would* be a circus, and that's a fact."

When they first arrived they stayed at a large hotel in the Puerta del Sol, but Mrs. Gainsborough got into trouble with the baths, partly because they cost five pesetas each and partly because she said it went to her heart to see a perfectly clean sheet floating about in the water. After that they tried a smaller hotel, where they were fairly comfortable, though Mrs. Gainsborough took a long time to get used to being brought chocolate in the morning.

"I miss my morning tea, Sylvia, and it's no use me pretending I don't. I don't feel like chocolate in the morning. I'd just as lieve have a slice of plum-pudding in a cup. Why, if you try to put a lump of sugar in, it won't sink; it keeps bobbing up like a kitten. And another thing I can't seem to get used to is having the fish after the meat. Every time it comes in like that it seems a kind of carelessness. What fish it is, too, when it does come. Well, they say a donkey can eat thistles, but it would take him all his time to get through one of those fish. No wonder they serve them after the meat. I should think they were afraid of the amount of meat any one might eat, trying to get the bones out of one's throat. I've felt like a pincushion ever since I got to Madrid, and how you can sing beats me. Your throat must be like a zither by now."

It really did not seem worth while to remain any longer in Madrid, and Sylvia asked to be released from her contract. The manager, who had been wondering to all the other girls why Sylvia had ever been sent to him, discovered that she was his chief attraction when she wanted to break the contract. However, a hundred pesetas in his own pocket removed all objections, and she was free to leave Spain.

"Well, do you want to go home?" she asked Mrs. Gainsborough. "Or would you come to Seville?"

"Now we've come so far, we may as well go on a bit farther," Mrs. Gainsborough thought.

Seville was very different from Madrid.

"Really, when you see oranges growing in the streets," Mrs. Gainsborough said, "you begin to understand why people ever goes abroad. Why, the flowers are really grand, Sylvia. Carnations as common as daisies. Well, I declare, I wrote home a post-card to Mrs. Beardmore and told her Seville was like being in a conservatory. She's living near Kew now, so she'll understand my meaning."

They both much enjoyed the dancing in the cafés, when solemn men hurled their sombreros on the dancers' platform to mark their appreciation of the superb creatures who flaunted themselves there so gracefully.

"But they're bold hussies with it all, aren't they?" Mrs. Gainsborough observed. "Upon me word, I wouldn't care to climb up there and swing my hips about like that."

From Seville, after an idle month of exquisite weather, often so warm that Sylvia could sit in the garden of the Alcazar and read in the shade of the lemon-trees, they went to Granada.

"So they've got an Alhambra here, have they?" said Mrs. Gainsborough. "But from what I've seen of the performances in Spain it won't come up to good old Leicester Square."

On Sylvia the Alhambra cast an enchantment more powerful than any famous edifice she had yet seen. Her admiration of cathedrals had always been tempered by a sense of missing most of what they stood for. They were still exercising their functions in a modern world and thereby overshadowed her personal emotions in a way that she found most discouraging to the imagination. The Alhambra, which once belonged to kings, now belonged to individual dreams. Those shaded courts where even at midday the ice lay thick upon the fountains; that sudden escape from a frozen chastity of brown stone out on the terraces rich with sunlight; that vision of the Sierra Nevada leaping against the blue sky with all its snowy peaks; this incredible meeting of East and South and North—to know all these was to stand in the center of the universe, oneself a king.

"What's it remind you of, Sylvia?" Mrs. Gainsborough asked.

"Everything," Sylvia cried. She felt that it would take but the least effort of will to light in one swoop upon the Sierra Nevada and from those bastions storm ... what?

"It reminds me just a tiddly-bit of Earl's Court," said Mrs. Gainsborough, putting her head on one side like a meditative hen. "If you shut one eye against those mountains, you'll see what I mean."

Sylvia came often by herself to the Alhambra; she had no scruples in leaving Mrs. Gainsborough, who had made friends at the pension with a lonely American widower.

"He knows everything," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "I've learned more in a fortnight with him than I ever learned in my whole life. What that man doesn't know! Well, I'm sure it's not worth knowing. He's been in trade and never been able to travel till now, but he's got the world off by heart, as you might say. I sent a p. c. to Mrs. Ewings to say I'd found a masher at last. The only thing against him is the noises he makes with his throat. I gave him some lozenges at first, but he made more noise than ever sucking them, and I had to desist."

Soon after Mrs. Gainsborough met her American, Sylvia made the acquaintance of a youthful guide of thirteen

or fourteen years, who for a very small wage adopted her and gave her much entertainment. Somehow or other Rodrigo had managed to pick up a good deal of English and French, which, as he pointed out, enabled him to compete with the older guides who resented his intrusion. Rodrigo did not consider that the career of a guide was worthy of real ambition. For the future he hesitated between being a gentleman's servant and a tobacconist in Gibraltar. He was a slim child with the perfect grace of the young South in movements and in manners alike.

Rodrigo was rather distressed at the beginning by Sylvia's want of appetite for mere sight-seeing; he reproved her indeed very gravely for wasting valuable time in repeating her visits to favorite spots while so many others remained unvisited. He was obsessed by the rapidity with which most tourists passed through Granada, but when he discovered that Sylvia had no intention of hurrying or being hurried, his native indolence blossomed to her sympathy and he adapted himself to her pleasure in sitting idle and dreaming in the sun.

Warmer weather came in February, and Rodrigo suggested that the Alhambra should be visited by moonlight. He did not make this suggestion because it was the custom of other English people to desire this experience; he realized that the Señorita was not influenced by what other people did; at the same time the Alhambra by moonlight could scarcely fail to please the Señorita's passion for beauty. He himself had a passion for beauty, and he pledged his word she would not regret following his advice; moreover, he would bring his guitar.

On a February night, when the moon was still high, Sylvia and Rodrigo walked up the avenue that led to the Alhambra. There was nobody on the summit but themselves. Far down lights flitted in the gipsy quarter, and there came up a faint noise of singing and music.

It was Carnival, Rodrigo explained, and the Señorita would have enjoyed it; but, alas! there were many rascals about on such nights, and though he was armed, he did not recommend a visit. He brought out his guitar; from beneath her Spanish cloak Sylvia also brought out a guitar.

"The Señorita plays? *Maravilloso!*" Rodrigo exclaimed. "But why the Señorita did not inform me to carry her guitar? The hill was long. The Señorita will be tired."

Sylvia opened with one of her old French songs, after which Rodrigo, who had paid her a courteous and critical attention, declared that she had a musician's soul like himself, and forthwith, in a treble that was limpid as the moon, light, unpassionate as the snow, remote as the mountains, he too sang.

"Exquisite," Sylvia sighed.

The Señorita was too kind, and as if to disclaim the compliment he went off into a mad gipsy tune. Suddenly he broke off.

"Hark! Does the Señorita hear a noise of weeping?"

There was indeed a sound of some one's crying, a sound that came nearer every moment.

"It is most unusual to hear a sound of weeping in the Alhambra *au clair de la lune*," said Rodrigo. "If the Señorita will permit me, I shall find out the cause."

Soon he came back with a girl whose cheeks glistened with tears.

"She is a dancer," Rodrigo explained. "She says she is Italian, but—" With a shrug of the shoulders he gave Sylvia to understand that he accepted no responsibility for her statement. It was Carnival.

Sylvia asked the new-comer in French what was the matter, but for some time she could only sob without saying a word. Rodrigo, who was regarding her with a mixture of disapproval and compassion, considered that she had reached the stage—he spoke with all possible respect for the Señorita, who must not suppose herself included in his generalization—the stage of incoherence that is so much more frequent with women than with men whose feelings have been upset. If he might suggest a remedy to the Señorita, it would be to leave her alone for a few minutes and continue the interrupted music. They had come here to enjoy the Alhambra by moonlight; it seemed a pity to allow the grief of an unknown dancer to spoil the beauty of the scene, grief that probably had nothing to do with the Alhambra, but was an echo of the world below. It might be a lovers' quarrel due to the discovery of a masked flirtation, a thing of no importance compared with the Alhambra by moonlight.

"I'm not such a philosopher as you, Rodrigo. I am a poor, inquisitive woman."

Certainly inquisitiveness might be laid to the charge of the feminine sex, he agreed, but not to all. There must be exceptions, and with a gesture expressive of tolerance for the weaknesses of womankind he managed to convey his intention of excepting Sylvia from Eve's heritage. Human nature was not all woven to the same pattern. Many of his friends, for instance, would fail to appreciate the Alhambra on such a night, and would prefer to blow horns in the streets.

By this time the grief of the stranger was less noisy, and Sylvia again asked her who she was and why she was weeping. She spoke in English this time; the fair, slim child, for when one looked at her she was scarcely more than fifteen, brightened.

"I don't know where I was," she said.

Rodrigo clicked his tongue and shook his head; he was shocked by this avowal much more deeply than in his sense of locality. Sylvia was puzzled by her accent. The 'w's' were nearly 'v's,' but the intonation was Italian.

"And you're a dancer?" she asked.

"Yes, I was dancing at the Estrella."

Rodrigo explained that this was a cabaret, the kind of place with which the Señorita would not be familiar.

"And you're Italian?"

The girl nodded, and Sylvia, seeing that it would be impossible to extract anything about her story in her present overwrought state, decided to take her back to the pension.

"And I will carry the Señorita's guitar," said Rodrigo. "To-morrow morning at eleven o'clock?" he asked by the gate of Sylvia's pension. "Or would the Señorita prefer that I waited to conduct the *señorita extraviada*?"

Sylvia bade him come in the morning; with a deep bow to her and to the stranger he departed, twanging his guitar. Mrs. Gainsborough, who by this time had reached the point of thinking that her American widower existed only to be oracular, wished to ask his advice about the stranger, and was quite offended with Sylvia for telling her rather sharply that she did not want all the inmates of the pension buzzing round the frightened child.

"Chocolate would be more useful than advice," Sylvia said.

"I know you're very down on poor Mr. Linthicum, but he's a mass of information. Only this morning he was explaining how you can keep eggs fresh for a year by putting them in a glass of water. Now I like a bit of advice. I'm not like you, you great harum-scarum thing."

Mrs. Gainsborough was unable to remain very long in a state of injured dignity; she soon came up to Sylvia's bedroom with cups of chocolate.

"And though you laugh at poor Mr. Linthicum," she said, "it's thanks to him you've got this chocolate so quick, for he talked to the servant himself."

With this Mrs. Gainsborough left the room in high good humor at the successful rehabilitation of the informative widower.

The girl, whose name was Concetta, had long ceased to lament, but she was still very shy, and Sylvia found it extremely difficult at first to reach any clear comprehension of her present trouble. Gradually, however, by letting her talk in her own breathless way, and in an odd mixture of English, French, German, and Italian, she was able to put together the facts into a kind of consecutiveness.

Her father had been an Italian, who for some reason that was not at all clear had lived at Aix-la-Chapelle. Her mother, to whom he had apparently never been married, had been a Fleming. This mother had died when Concetta was about four, and her father had married a German woman who had beaten her, particularly after her father had either died or abandoned his child to the stepmother—it was not clear which. At this point an elder brother appeared in the tale, who at the age of eleven had managed to steal some money and run away. Of this brother Concetta had made an ideal hero. She dreamed of him even now and never came to any town but that she expected to meet him there. Sylvia had asked her how she expected to recognize somebody who had disappeared from her life when she was only six years old, but Concetta insisted that she should know him again. When she said this, she looked round her with an expression of fear and asked if anybody could overhear them. Sylvia assured her that they were quite alone, and Concetta said in a whisper:

"Once in Milano I saw Francesco. Hush! he passed in the street, and I said, 'Francesco,' and he said, 'Concettina,' but we could not speak together more longer."

Sylvia would not contest this assertion, though she made up her mind that it must have been a dream.

"It was a pity you could not speak," she said.

"Yes, nothing but Francesco and Concettina before he was gone. *Peccato! Peccato!*"

Francesco's example had illuminated his sister's life with the hope of escaping from the stepmother, and she had hoarded pennies month after month for three years. She would not speak in detail of the cruelty of her stepmother; the memory of it even at this distance of time was too much charged with horror. It was evident to Sylvia that she had suffered exceptional things and that this was no case of ordinary unkindness. There was still in Concetta's eyes the look of an animal in a trap, and Sylvia felt a rage at human cruelty hammering upon her brain. One read of these things with an idle shudder, but, oh, to behold before one a child whose very soul was scarred. There was more for the imagination to feed upon, because Concetta said that not only was her stepmother cruel, but also her school-teachers and schoolmates.

"Everybody was liking to beat me. I don't know why, but they was liking to beat me; no, really, they was liking it."

At last, and here Concetta was very vague, as if she were seeking to recapture the outlines of a dream that fades in the light of morning, somehow or other she ran away and arrived at a big place with trees in a large city.

"Where, at Aix-la-Chapelle?"

"No, I got into a train and came somewhere to a big place with trees in the middle of a city."

"Was it a park in Brussels?"

She shrugged her shoulders and came back to her tale. In this park she had met some little girls who had played with her; they had played a game of joining hands and dancing round in a circle until they all fell down in the grass. A gentleman had laughed to see them amusing themselves so much, and the little girls had asked her to come with them and the gentleman; they had danced round him and pulled his coat to make him take Concetta. He had asked her whence she came and whither she was going; he was a schoolmaster and he was going far away with all these other little girls. Concetta had cried when they were leaving her, and the gentleman, when he found that she was really alone in this big city, had finally been persuaded to take her with him. They went far away in the train to Dantzic, where he had a school to learn dancing. She had been happy there; the master was very kind. When she was thirteen she had gone with the other girls from the school to dance in the ballet at La Scala in Milan, but before that she had danced at Dresden and Munich. Then about six months ago a juggler called Zozo had wanted her and another girl to join his act. He was a young man; she had liked him and she had left Milan with him. They had performed in Rome and Naples and Bari and Palermo. At Palermo the other girl had gone back to her home in Italy, and Concetta had traveled to Spain with Zozo through Tunis and Algiers and Oran. Zozo had treated her kindly until they came here to the Estrella Concert; but here he had changed and, when she did not like him to make love to her, he had beaten her. To-night before they went to the cabaret he had told her that unless she would let him love her he would throw the daggers at her heart. In their act she was tied up and he threw daggers all round her. She had been frightened, and when he went to dress she had run away; but the streets were full of people in masks, and she had lost herself.

Sylvia looked at this child with her fair hair, who but for the agony and fear in her blue eyes would have been like one of those rapturous angels in old Flemish pictures. Here she sat, as ten years ago Sylvia had sat in the cab-shelter talking to Fred Organ. Her story and Concetta's met at this point in man's vileness.

"My poor little thing, you must come and live with me," cried Sylvia, clasping Concetta in her arms. "I too am all alone, and I should love to feel that somebody was dependent on me. You shall come with me to England. You're just what I've been looking for. Now I'm going to put you to bed, for you're worn out."

"But he'll come to find me," Concetta gasped, in sudden affright. "He was so clever. On the program you can read. Zozo: *el mejor prestigador del mundo*. He knows everything."

"We must introduce him to Mrs. Gainsborough. She likes encyclopedias with pockets."

"Please?"

"I was talking to myself. My dear, you'll be perfectly safe here with me from the greatest magician in the world."

In the end she was able to calm Concetta's fears; in sleep, when those frightened eyes were closed, she seemed younger than ever, and Sylvia brooded over her by candle-light as if she were indeed her child.

Mrs. Gainsborough, on being told next morning Concetta's story and Sylvia's resolve to adopt her, gave her blessing to the plan.

"Mulberry Cottage'll be nice for her to play about in. She'll be able to dig in the garden. We'll buy a bucket and spade. Fancy, what wicked people there are in this world. But I blame her stepmother more than I do this Shoushou."

Mrs. Gainsborough persisted in treating Concetta as if she were about nine years old and was continually thinking of toys that might amuse her. When at last she was brought to realize that she was fifteen, she was greatly disappointed on behalf of Mr. Linthicum, to whom she had presented Concetta as an infant prodigy.

"He commented so much on the languages she could speak, and he told her of a quick way to practise elemental American, which I always thought was the same as English, but apparently it's not. It's a much older language, really, and came over with Christopher Columbus in the *Mayflower*."

Rodrigo was informed by Sylvia that henceforth the Señorita Concetta would live with her. He expressed no surprise and accepted with a charming courtliness the new situation at the birth of which he had presided. Sylvia thought it might be prudent to take Rodrigo so far into her confidence as to give him a hint about a possible attempt by the juggler to get Concetta back into his power. Rodrigo looked very serious at the notion, and advised the Señorita to leave Granada quickly. It was against his interest to give this counsel, for he should lose his Señorita, the possession of whom had exposed him to a good deal of envy from the other guides. Besides, he had grown fond of the Señorita and he should miss her. He had intended to practise much on his guitar this spring, and he had looked forward to hearing the nightingales with her; they would be singing next month in the lemon-groves. Many people were deaf to the song of birds, but personally he could not listen to them without ... a shrug of the shoulders expressed the incommunicable emotion.

"You shall come with us, Rodrigo."

"To Gibraltar?" he asked, quickly, with flashing eyes.

"Why not?" said Sylvia.

He seized her hand and kissed it.

"*El destino*," he murmured. "I shall certainly see there the tobacco-shop that one day I shall have."

For two or three days Rodrigo guarded the pension against the conjuror and his spies. By this time between Concetta's apprehensions and Mrs. Gainsborough's exaggeration of them, Zozo had acquired a demoniac menace, lurking in the background of enjoyment like a child's fear.

The train for Algeciras would leave in the morning at four o'clock. It was advisable, Rodrigo thought, to be at the railway station by two o'clock at the latest; he should come with a carriage to meet them. Would the Señorita excuse him this evening, because his mother—he gave one of his inimitable shrugs to express the need of sometimes yielding to maternal fondness—wished him to spend his last evening with her.

At two o'clock next morning Rodrigo had not arrived, but at three a carriage drove up and the coachman handed Sylvia a note. It was in Spanish to say that Rodrigo had met with an accident and that he was very ill. He kissed the Señorita's hand. He believed that he was going to die, which was his only consolation for not being able to go with her to Gibraltar; it was *el destino*; he had brought the accident on himself.

Sylvia drove with Mrs. Gainsborough and Concetta to the railway station. When she arrived and found that the train would not leave till five, she kept the coachman and, after seeing her companions safely into their compartment, drove to where Rodrigo lived.

He was lying in a hovel in the poorest part of the city. His mother, a ragged old woman, was lamenting in a corner; one or two neighbors were trying to quiet her. On Sylvia's arrival they all broke out in a loud wail of apology for the misfortune that had made Rodrigo break his engagement. Sylvia paid no attention to them, but went quickly across to the bed of the sick boy. He opened his eyes and with an effort put out a slim brown arm and caught hold of her hand to kiss it. She leaned over and kissed his pale lips. In a very faint voice, hiding his head in the pillow for shame, he explained that he had brought the accident on himself by his boasting. He had boasted so much about the tobacco-shop and the favor of the Señorita that an older boy, another guide, a—he tried to shrug his shoulders in contemptuous expression of this older boy's inferior quality, but his body contracted in a spasm of pain and he had to set criticism on one side. This older boy had hit him out of jealousy, and, alas! Rodrigo had lost his temper and drawn a knife, but the other boy had stabbed first. It was *el destino* most unhappily precipitated by his own vainglory.

Sylvia turned to the women to ask what could be done. Their weeping redoubled. The doctor had declared it was only a matter of hours; the priest had given unction. Suddenly Rodrigo with a violent effort clutched at Sylvia's hand:

"Señorita, the train!"

He fell back dead.

Sylvia left money for the funeral; there was nothing more to be done. In the morning twilight she went down the foul stairs and back to the carriage that seemed now to smell of death.

When she arrived at the station a great commotion was taking place on the platform, and Mrs. Gainsborough appeared, surrounded by a gesticulating crowd of porters, officials, and passengers.

"Sylvia! Well, I'm glad you've got here at last. She's gone. He's whisked her away. And can I explain what I want to these Spanish idiots? No. I've shouted as hard as I could, and they *won't* understand. They *won't* understand me. They don't want to understand, that's my opinion."

With which Mrs. Gainsborough sailed off again along the platform, followed by the crowd, which, in addition to arguing with her occasionally, detached from itself small groups to argue furiously with one another about her incomprehensible desire. Sylvia extricated their luggage from the compartment, for the train to go to Algeciras without them; then she extricated Mrs. Gainsborough from the general noise and confusion that was now being added to by loud whistles from the impatient train.

"I was sitting in one corner and Concertina was sitting in the other," Mrs. Gainsborough explained to Sylvia. "I'd just bobbed down to pick up me glasses when I saw that Shoushou beckoning to her, though for the moment I



thought it was the porter. Concertina went as white as paper. 'Here,' I hollered, 'what are you doing?' and with that I got up from my place and tripped over *your* luggage and came down bump on the foot-warmer. When I got up she was gone. Depend upon it, he'd been watching out for her at the station. As soon as I could get out of the carriage I started hollering, and every one in the station came running round to see what was the matter. I tried to tell them about Shoushou, and they pretended—for don't you tell me I can't make myself understood if people want to understand—they pretended they thought I was asking whether I was in the right train. When I hollered 'Shoushou,' they all started to holler 'Shoushou' as well and nod their heads and point to the train. I got that aggravated, I could have killed them. And then what do you think they did? Insulting I call it. Why, they all began to laugh and beckon to me, and I, thinking that at last they'd found out my meaning, went and followed them like a silly juggins, and where do you think they took me? To the moojerics! what *we* call the ladies' cloak-room. Well, that did make me annoyed, and I started in to tell them what I thought of such behavior. 'I don't want the moojerics,' I shouted. Then I tried to explain by illustrating my meaning. I took hold of some young fellow and said 'Shoushou,' and then I caught hold of a hussy that was laughing, intending to make her Concertina, but the silly little bitch—really it's enough to make any one a bit unrefined—*she* thought I was going to hit her and started in to scream the station-roof down. After that you came along, but of course it was too late."

Sylvia was very much upset by the death of Rodrigo and the loss of Concetta, but she could not help laughing over Mrs. Gainsborough's woes.

"It's all very well for you to sit there and laugh, you great tomboy, but it's your own fault. If you'd have let me bring Mr. Linthicum, this wouldn't have happened. What could I do? I felt like a missionary among a lot of cannibals."

In the end Sylvia was glad to avail herself of the widower's help, but after two days even he had to admit himself beaten.

"And if he says they can't be found," said Mrs. Gainsborough, "depend upon it they can't be found—not by anybody. That man's as persistent as a beggar. When he came up to me this morning and cleared his throat and shook his head, well, then I knew we might as well give up hope."

Sylvia stayed on for a while in Granada because she did not like to admit defeat, but the sadness of Rodrigo's death and the disappointment over Concetta had spoiled the place for her. Here was another of these incomplete achievements that made life so bitter. She had thought for a brief space that the solitary and frightened child would provide the aim that she had so ardently desired. Concetta had responded so sweetly to her protection, had chattered with such delight of going to England and of becoming English; now she had been dragged back. *El destino!* Rodrigo's death did not affect her so much as the loss of that fair, slim child. His short life had been complete; he was spared forever from disillusionment, and by existing in her memory eternally young and joyous and wise he had spared his Señorita also the pain of disillusionment, just as when he was alive he had always assumed the little bothers upon his shoulders, the little bothers of every-day existence. His was a perfect episode, but Concetta disturbed her with vain regrets and speculations. Yet in a way Concetta had helped her, for she knew now that she held in her heart an inviolate treasure of love. Never again could anything happen like those three months after she left Philip; never again could she treat any one with the scorn she had treated Michael; never again could she take such a cynical attitude toward any one as that she had taken toward Lily. All these disappointments added a little gold tried by fire to the treasure in her heart, and firmly she must believe that it was being stored to some purpose soon to be showered prodigally, ah, how prodigally, upon somebody.

That evening Sylvia had made up her mind to return to England at once, but after she had gone to bed she was awakened by Mrs. Gainsborough's coming into her room and in a choked voice asking for help. When the light was turned on, Sylvia saw that she was enmeshed in a mosquito-net and looking in her nightgown like a large turbot.

"I knew it would happen," Mrs. Gainsborough panted. "Every night I've said to myself, 'It's bound to happen,' and it has. I was dreaming how that Shoushou was chasing me with a butterfly-net, and look at me! Don't tell me dreams don't sometimes come true. Now don't stand there in fits of laughter. I can't get out of it, you unfeeling thing. I've swallowed about a pint of Keating's. I hope I sha'n't come out in spots. Come and help me out. I daren't move a finger, or I shall start off sneezing again. And every time I sneeze I get deeper in. It's something chronic."

"Didn't Linthicum ever inform you how to get out of a mosquito-net that collapses in the middle of the night?" Sylvia asked, when she had extricated the old lady.

"No, the conversation never happened to take a turn that way. But depend upon it, I shall ask him to-morrow. I won't be caught twice."

Sylvia suddenly felt that it would be impossible to return to England yet.

"We must go on," she told Mrs. Gainsborough. "You must have more opportunities for practising what Linthicum has been preaching to you."

"What you'd like is for me to make a poppy-show of myself all over the world and drag me round the Continent like a performing bear."

"We'll go to Morocco," Sylvia cried.

"Don't shout like that. You'll set me off on the sneeze again. You're here, there, and everywhere like a demon king, I do declare. Morocco? That's where the leather comes from, isn't it? Do they have mosquito-nets there too?"

Sylvia nodded.

"Well, the first thing I shall do to-morrow is to ask Mr. Linthicum what's the best way of fastening up a mosquito-net in Morocco. And now I suppose I shall wake up in the morning with a nose like a tomato. Ah, well, such is life."

Mrs. Gainsborough went back to bed, and Sylvia lay awake thinking of Morocco.

Mr. Linthicum came to see them off on their second attempt to leave Granada. He cleared his throat rather more loudly than usual to compete with the noise of the railway, invited them to look him up if they ever came to Schenectady, pressed a book called *Five Hundred Facts for the Waistcoat Pocket* into Mrs. Gainsborough's hands, and waved them out of sight with a large bandana handkerchief.

"Well, I shall miss that man," said Mrs. Gainsborough, settling down to the journey. "He must have been a regular education for his customers, and I shall never forget his recipe for avoiding bunions when mountaineering."

"How's that done?"

"Oh, I don't remember the details. I didn't pay any attention to them, because it's not to be supposed that I'm going to career up Mont Blong at my time of life. No, I was making a reference to the tone of his voice. They may be descended from Indians, but I dare say Adam wasn't much better than a red Indian, if it comes to that."

They traveled to Cadiz for the boat to Tangier. Mrs. Gainsborough got very worried on the long spit of land over which the train passed, and insisted on piling up all the luggage at one end of the compartment in case they fell into the sea, though she was unable to explain her motive for doing this. The result was that, when they stopped at a station before Cadiz and the door of the compartment was opened suddenly, all the luggage fell out on top of three priests that were preparing to climb in, one of whom was knocked flat. Apart from the argument that ensued the journey was uneventful.

The boat from Tangier left in the dark. At dawn Cadiz glimmered like a rosy pearl upon the horizon.

"We're in Trafalgar Bay now," said Sylvia.

But Mrs. Gainsborough, who was feeling the effects of getting up so early, said she wished it was Trafalgar Square and begged to be left in peace. After an hour's doze in the sunlight she roused herself slightly:

"Where's this Trafalgar Bay you were making such a fuss about?"

"We've passed it now," Sylvia said.

"Oh, well, I dare say it wasn't anything to look at. I'm bound to say the chocolate we had this morning does not seem to go with the sea air. They're arguing the point inside me something dreadful. I suppose this boat is safe? It seems to be jiggling a good deal. Mr. Linthicum said it was a good plan to put the head between the knees when you felt a bit—well, I wouldn't say seasick—but you know.... I'm bound to say I think he was wrong for once. I feel more like putting my knees up over my head. Can't you speak to the captain and tell him to go a bit more quietly? It's no good racing along like he's doing. Of course the boat jigs. I shall get aggravated in two twos. It's to be hoped Morocco will be worth it. I never got up so early to go anywhere. Was that sailor laughing at me when he walked past? It's no good my getting up to tell him what I think of him, because every time I try to get up the boat gets up with me. It keeps butting into me behind like a great billy-goat."

Presently Mrs. Gainsborough was unable even to protest against the motion, and could only murmur faintly to Sylvia a request to remove her veil.

"Here we are," cried Sylvia, three or four hours later. "And it's glorious!"

Mrs. Gainsborough sat up and looked at the rowboats filled with Moors, negroes, and Jews.

"But they're nearly all of them black," she gasped.

"Of course they are. What color did you expect them to be? Green like yourself?"

"But do you mean to say you've brought me to a place inhabited by blacks? Well, I never did. It's to be hoped we sha'n't be eaten alive. Mrs. Marsham! Mrs. Ewings! Mrs. Beardmore! Well, I don't say they haven't told me some good stories now and again, but—"

Mrs. Gainsborough shook her head to express the depths of insignificance to which henceforth the best stories of her friends would have to sink when she should tell about herself in Morocco.

"Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," said Mrs. Gainsborough, when they stood upon the quay. "I feel like the widow Twankay myself."

Sylvia remembered her ambition to visit the East, when she herself wore a yashmak in Open Sesame: here it was fulfilling perfectly her most daring hopes.

Mrs. Gainsborough was relieved to find a comparatively European hotel, and next morning after a long sleep she was ready for any adventure.

"Sylvia!" she suddenly screamed when they were being jostled in the crowded bazaar. "Look, there's a camel coming toward us! Did you ever hear such a hollering and jabbering in all your life? I'm sure I never did. Mrs. Marsham and her camel at the Zoo. Tut-tut-tut! Do you suppose Mrs. Marsham ever saw a camel coming toward her in the street like a cab-horse might? Certainly not. Why, after this there's nothing *in* her story. It's a mere anecdote."

They wandered up to the outskirts of the prison, and saw a fat Jewess being pushed along under arrest for giving false weight. She made some resistance in the narrow entrance, and the guard planted his foot in the small of her back, so that she seemed suddenly to crumple up and fall inside.

"Well, I've often said lightly 'what a heathen' or 'there's a young heathen,' but that brings it home to one," said Mrs. Gainsborough, gravely.

Sylvia paid no attention to her companion's outraged sympathy. She was in the East where elderly obese Jewesses who gave false weight were well treated thus. She was living with every moment of rapturous reality the dreams of wonder that the *Arabian Nights* had brought her in youth. Yet Tangier was only a gateway to enchantments a hundredfold more powerful. She turned suddenly to Mrs. Gainsborough and asked her if she could stay here while she rode into the interior.

"Stay here alone?" Mrs. Gainsborough exclaimed. "Not if I know it."

This plan of Sylvia's to explore the interior of Morocco was narrowed down ultimately into riding to Tetuan, which was apparently just feasible for Mrs. Gainsborough, though likely to be rather fatiguing.

A dragoman was found, a certain Don Alfonso reported to be comparatively honest. He was an undersized man rather like the stump of a tallow candle into which the wick has been pressed down by the snuffer, for he was bald and cream-colored, with a thin, uneven black mustache and two nodules on his forehead. His clothes, too, were crinkled like a candlestick. He spoke French well, but preferred to speak English, of which he only knew two words, "all right"; this often made his advice unduly optimistic. In addition to Don Alfonso they were accompanied by a Moorish trooper and a native called Mohammed.

"A soldier, is he?" said Mrs. Gainsborough, regarding the grave bearded man to whose care they were intrusted. "He looks more like the outside of an ironmonger's shop. Swords, pistols, guns, spears. It's to be hoped he won't get aggravated with us on the way. I should look very funny lying in the road with a pistol through my heart."

They rode out of Tangier before a single star had paled in the east, and when dawn broke they were in a wide valley fertile and bright with flowers; green hills rose to right and left of them and faded far away into blue

mountains.

"I wish you'd tell that Mahomet not to irritate my poor mule by egging it on all the time," Mrs. Gainsborough said to Don Alfonso, who, realizing by her gestures that she wanted something done to her mount, and supposing by her smile that the elation of adventure had seized her, replied "All right," and said something in Moorish to Mohammed. He at once caught the mule a terrific whack on the crupper, causing the animal to leap forward and leave Mrs. Gainsborough and the saddle in the path.

"Now there's a nice game to play!" said Mrs. Gainsborough, indignantly. "'All right,' he says, and 'boomph'! What's he think I'm made of? Well, of course here we shall have to sit now until some one comes along with a step-ladder. If you'd have let me ride on a camel," she added, reproachfully, to Sylvia, "this wouldn't have occurred. I'm not sitting on myself any more; I'm sitting on bumps like eggs. I feel like a hen. It's all very fine for Mr. Alfonso to go on gabbling, 'All right,' but it's all wrong, and if you'll have the goodness to tell him so in his own unnatural language I'll be highly obliged."

The Moorish soldier sat regarding the scene from his horse with immutable gravity.

"I reckon he'd like nothing better than to get a good jab at me now," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "Yes, I dare say I look very inviting sitting here on the ground. Well, it's to be hoped they'll have the 'Forty Thieves' or 'Aladdin' for the next pantomime at Drury Lane. I shall certainly invite Mrs. Marsham and Mrs. Beardmore to come with me into the upper boxes so as I can explain what it's all about. Mrs. Ewings doesn't like panto, or I'd have taken her too. She likes a good cry when she goes to the theater."

Mrs. Gainsborough was settling down to spend the rest of the morning in amiable reminiscence and planning, but she was at last persuaded to get up and mount her mule again after the strictest assurances had been given to her of Mohammed's good behavior for the rest of the journey.

"He's not to bellow in the poor animal's ear," she stipulated.

Sylvia promised.

"And he's not to go screeching, 'Arrassy,' or whatever it is, behind, so as the poor animal thinks it's a lion galloping after him."

Mrs. Gainsborough was transferring all consideration for herself to the mule.

"And he's to throw away that stick."

This clause was only accepted by the other side with a good deal of protestation.

"And he's to keep his hands and feet to himself, and not to throw stones or nothing at the poor beast, who's got quite enough to do to carry me."

"And Ali Baba's to ride in front." She indicated the trooper. "It gets me on the blink when he's behind me, as if I was in a shooting-gallery. If he's going to be any use to us, *which* I doubt, he'll be more useful in front than hiding behind me."

"All right," said Don Alfonso, who was anxious to get on, because they had a long way to go.

"And that's enough of 'all right' from him," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "I don't want to hear any more 'all rights.'"

At midday they reached a khan, where they ate lunch and rested for two hours in the shade.

Soon after they had started again, they met a small caravan with veiled women and mules loaded with oranges.

"Quite pleasant-looking people," Mrs. Gainsborough beamed. "I should have waved my hand if I could have been sure of not falling off again. Funny trick, wearing that stuff round their faces. I suppose they're ashamed of being so black."

Mrs. Gainsborough's progress, which grew more and more leisurely as the afternoon advanced, became a source of real anxiety to Don Alfonso; he confided to Sylvia that he was afraid the gates of Tetuan would be shut. When Mrs. Gainsborough was told of his alarm she was extremely scornful.

"He's having you on, Sylvia, so as to give Mohamet the chance of sloshing my poor mule again. Whoever heard of a town having gates? He'll tell us next that we've got to pay sixpence at the turnstile to pass in."

They came to a high place where a white stone by the path recorded a battle between Spaniards and Moors. Far below were the domes and rose-dyed minarets of Tetuan and a shining river winding to the sea. They heard the sound of a distant gun.

"Sunset," cried Don Alfonso, much perturbed. "In half an hour the gates will be shut."

He told tales of brigands and of Riffs, of travelers found with their throats cut outside the city walls, and suddenly, as if to give point to his fears, a figure leaning on a long musket appeared in silhouette upon the edge of the hill above them. It really seemed advisable to hurry, and, notwithstanding Mrs. Gainsborough's expostulations, the speed of the party was doubled down a rocky descent to a dried-up watercourse with high banks. Twilight came on rapidly and the soldier prepared one of his numerous weapons for immediate use in an emergency. Mrs. Gainsborough was much too nervous about falling off to bother about brigands, and at last without any mishap they reached the great castellated gate of Tetuan. It was shut.

"Well, I never saw the like," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "It's true, then. We must ring the bell, that's all."

The soldier, Mohammed, and Don Alfonso raised their voices in a loud hail, but nobody paid any attention, and the twilight deepened. Mrs. Gainsborough alighted from her mule and thumped at the iron-studded door. Silence answered her.

"Do you mean to tell me seriously that they're going to keep us outside here all night? Why, it's laughable!" Suddenly she lifted her voice and cried, "Milk-ho!" Whether the unusual sound aroused the curiosity or the alarm of the porter within was uncertain, but he leaned his head out of a small window above the gate and shouted something at the belated party below. Immediately the dispute for which Mohammed and Don Alfonso had been waiting like terriers on a leash was begun; it lasted for ten minutes without any of the three participants drawing breath.

In the end Don Alfonso announced that the porter declined to open for less than two francs, although he had offered him as much as one franc fifty. With a determination not to be beaten that was renewed by the pause for breath, Don Alfonso flung himself into the argument again, splendidly assisted by Mohammed, who seemed to be tearing out his hair in baffled fury.

"I wish I knew what they were calling each other," said Sylvia.

"Something highly insulting, I should think," Mrs. Gainsborough answered. "Wonderful the way they use their hands. He doesn't seem to be worrying himself so very much. I suppose he'll start in shooting in the end."

She pointed to the soldier, who was regarding the dispute with contemptuous gravity. Another window in a tower on the other side of the gate was opened, and the first porter was reinforced. Perspiration was dripping from Don Alfonso's forehead; he looked more like a candle stump than ever, when presently he stood aside from the argument to say that he had been forced to offer one franc seventy-five to enter Tetuan.

"Tetuan," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "Tetuarn't, I should say."

Sylvia asked Don Alfonso what he was calling the porter, and it appeared, though he minimized the insult by a gesture, that he had just invited forty-three dogs to devour the corpse of the porter's grandmother. This, however, he hastened to add, had not annoyed him so much as his withdrawal from one franc fifty to one franc twenty-five.

In the end the porter agreed to open the gate for one franc seventy-five.

"Which is just as well," said Mrs. Gainsborough, "for I'm sure Mohamet would have thrown a fit soon. He's got to banging his forehead with his fists, and that's a very bad sign."

They rode through the darkness between double walls, disturbing every now and then a beggar who whined for alms or cursed them if the mule trod upon his outspread legs. They found an inn called the *Hôtel Splendide*, a bug-ridden tumble-down place kept by Spanish Jews as voracious as the bugs. Yet out on the roof, looking at the domes and minarets glimmering under Venus setting in the west from a sky full of stars, listening to the howling of distant dogs, breathing the perfume of the East, Sylvia felt like a conqueror.

Next morning Mrs. Gainsborough, finding that the bugs had retreated with the light, decided to spend the morning in sleeping off some of her bruises. Sylvia wandered through the bazaars with Don Alfonso, and sat for a while in the garden of a French convent, where a fountain whispered in the shade of pomegranates. Suddenly, walking along the path toward her she saw Maurice Avery.

Sylvia had disliked Avery very much when she met him in London nearly two years ago; but the worst enemy, the most flagitious bore, is transformed when encountered alone in a distant country, and now Sylvia felt well disposed toward him and eager to share with any one who could appreciate her pleasure the marvel of being in Tetuan. He too, by the way his face lighted up, was glad to see her, and they shook hands with a cordiality that was quite out of proportion to their earlier acquaintance.

"I say, what a queer place to meet!" he exclaimed. "Are you alone, then?"

"I've got Mrs. Gainsborough with me, that's all. I'm not married ... or anything."

It was absurd how eager she felt to assure Avery of this; and then in a moment the topic had been started.

"No, have you really got Mrs. Gainsborough?" he exclaimed. "Of course I've heard about her from Michael. Poor old Michael!"

"Why, what's the matter?" Sylvia asked, sharply.

"Oh, he's perfectly all right, but he's lost to his friends. At least I suppose he is—buried in a monastery. He's not actually a monk. I believe he's what's called an oblate, pursuing the *Fata Morgana* of faith—a sort of dream...."

"Yes, yes," Sylvia interrupted. "I understand the allusion. You needn't talk down to me."

Avery blushed. The color in his cheeks made him seem very young.

"Sorry. I was thinking of somebody else for the moment. That sounds very discourteous also. I must apologize again. What's happened to Lily Haden?"

Sylvia told him briefly the circumstances of Lily's marriage at Rio. "Does Michael ever talk about her?" she asked.

"Oh no, never!" said Avery. "He's engaged in saving his own soul now. That sounds malicious, but seriously I don't think she was ever more to him than an intellectual landmark. To understand Michael's point of view in all that business you've got to know that he was illegitimate. His father, Lord Saxby, had a romantic passion for the daughter of a country parson—a queer, cross-grained old scholar. You remember Arthur Lonsdale? Well, his father, Lord Cleveden, knew the whole history of the affair. Lady Saxby wouldn't divorce him; so they were never married. I suppose Michael brooded over this and magnified his early devotion to Lily in some way or other up to a vow of reparation. I'm quite sure it was a kind of indirect compliment to his own mother. Of course it was all very youthful and foolish—and yet I don't know...." he broke off with a sigh.

"You think one can't afford to bury the past?"

Avery looked at her quickly. "What made you ask me that?"

"I thought you seemed to admire Michael's youthful foolishness."

"I do really. I admire any one that's steadfast even to a mistaken idea. It's strange to meet an Englishwoman here," he said, looking intently at Sylvia. "One's guard drops. I'm longing to make a confidante of you, but you might be bored. I'm rather frightened of you, really. I always was."

"I sha'n't exchange confidences," Sylvia said, "if that's what you're afraid of."

"No, of course not," Avery said, quickly. "Last spring I was in love with a girl...."

Sylvia raised her eyebrows.

"Oh yes, it's a very commonplace beginning and rather a commonplace end, I'm afraid. She was a ballet-girl—the incarnation of May and London. That sounds exaggerated, for I know that lots of other Jenny Pearls have been the same to somebody, but I do believe most people agreed with me. I wanted her to live with me. She wouldn't. She had sentimental, or what I thought were sentimental, ideas about her mother and family. I was called away to Spain. When my business was finished I begged her to come out to me there. That was last April. She refused, and I was piqued, I suppose, at first, and did not go back to England. Then, as one does, I made up my mind to the easiest thing at the moment by letting myself be enchanted by my surroundings into thinking that I was happier as it was. For a while I was happier; in a way our love had been a great strain upon us both. I came to Morocco, and gradually ever since I've been realizing that I left something unfinished. It's become a kind of obsession. Do you know what I mean?"

"Indeed I do, very well indeed," Sylvia said.

"Thanks," he said with a grateful look. "Now comes the problem. If I go back to England this month, if I arrive in

England on the first of May exactly a year later, there's only one thing I can do to atone for my behavior—I must ask her to marry me. You see that, don't you? This little thing is proud, oh, but tremendously proud. I doubt very much if she'll forgive me, even if I show the sincerity of my regret by asking her to marry me now; but it's my only chance. And yet—oh, I expect this will sound damnable to you, but it's the way we've all been molded in England—she's common. Common! What an outrageous word to use. But then it is used by everybody. She's the most frankly cockney thing you ever saw. Can I stand her being snubbed and patronized? Can I stand my wife's being snubbed and patronized? Can love survive the sort of ambushed criticism that I shall perceive all round us? For I wouldn't try to change her. No, no, no! She must be herself. I'll have no throaty 'aws' masquerading as 'o's.' She must keep her own clear 'aou's.' There must not be any 'naceness' or patched-up shop-walker's English. I love her more at this moment than I ever loved her, but can I stand it? And I'm not asking this egotistically: I'm asking it for both of us. That's why you meet me in Tetuan, for I dare not go back to England lest the first cockney voice I hear may kill my determination, and I really am longing to marry her. Yet I wait here, staking what I know in my heart is all my future happiness on chance, assuring myself that presently impulse and reason will be reconciled and will send me back to her, but still I wait."

He paused. The fountain whispered in the shade of the pomegranates. A nun was gathering flowers for the chapel. Outside, the turmoil of the East sounded like the distant chattering of innumerable monkeys.

"You've so nearly reached the point at which a man has the right to approach a woman," Sylvia said, "that if you're asking my advice, I advise you to wait until you do actually reach that point. Of course you may lose her by waiting. She may marry somebody else."

"Oh, I know; I've thought of that. In a way that would be a solution."

"So long as you regard her marriage with somebody else as a solution, you're still some way from the point. It's curious she should be a ballet-girl, because Mrs. Gainsborough, you know, was a ballet-girl. In 1869, when she took her emotional plunge, she was able to exchange the wings of Covent Garden for the wings of love easily enough. In 1869 ballet-girls never thought of marrying what were and are called 'gentlemen.' I think Mrs. Gainsborough would consider her life a success; she was not too much married to spoil love, and the captain was certainly more devoted to her than most husbands would have been. The proof that her life was a success is that she has remained young. Yet if I introduce you to her you'll see at once your own Jenny at sixty like her—that won't be at all a hard feat of imagination. But you'll still be seeing yourself at twenty-five or whatever you are; you'll never be able to see yourself at sixty; therefore I sha'n't introduce you. I'm too much of a woman not to hope with all my heart that you'll go home to England, marry your Jenny, and live happily ever afterward, and I think you'd better not meet Mrs. Gainsborough, in case she prejudices your resolve. Thanks for giving me your confidence."

"Oh no! Thank *you* for listening," said Avery.

"I'm glad you're not going to develop her. I once suffered from that kind of vivisection myself, though I never had a cockney accent. Some souls can't stand straight lacing, just as some bodies revolt from stays. And so Michael is in a monastery? I suppose that means all his soul spasms are finally allayed?"

"O Lord! No!" said Avery. "He's in the very middle of them."

"What I really meant to say was heart palpitations."

"I don't think, really," said Avery, "that Michael ever had them."

"What was Lily, then?"

"Oh, essentially a soul spasm," he declared.

"Yes, I suppose it was," Sylvia agreed, pensively.

"I think, you know, I must meet Mrs. Gainsborough," said Avery. "Fate answers for you. Here she comes."

Don Alfonso, with the pain that every dog and dragoman feels in the separation of his charges, had taken advantage of Sylvia's talk with Avery to bring Mrs. Gainsborough triumphantly back to the fold.

"Here we are again," said Mrs. Gainsborough, limping down the path. "And my behind looks like a magic lantern. Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't see you'd met a friend. So that's what Alfonso was trying to tell me. He's been going like an alarm-clock all the way here. Pleased to meet you, I'm sure. How do you like Morocco? We got shut out last night."

"This is a friend of Michael Fane's," said Sylvia.

"Did you know *him*? He *was* a nice young fellow. Very nice he was. But he wouldn't know me now. Very stay-at-home I was when he used to come to Mulberry Cottage. Why, he tried to make me ride in a hansom once, and I was actually too nervous. You know, I'd got into a regular rut. But now, well, upon me word, I don't believe now I should say 'no' if any one was to invite me to ride inside of a whale. It's her doing, the tartar."

Avery had learned a certain amount of Arabic during his stay in Morocco and he made the bazaars of Tetuan much more interesting than Don Alfonso could have done. He also had many tales to tell of the remote cities like Fez and Mequinez and Marakeesh. Sylvia almost wished that she could pack Mrs. Gainsborough off to England and accompany him into the real interior. Some of her satisfaction in Tetuan had been rather spoiled that morning by finding a visitor's book in the hotel with the names of traveling clergymen and their daughters patronizingly inscribed therein. However, Avery decided to ride away almost at once, and said that he intended to banish the twentieth century for two or three months.

They stayed a few days at Tetuan, but the bugs were too many for Mrs. Gainsborough, who began to sigh for a tranquil bed. Avery and Sylvia had a short conversation together before they left. He thanked her for her sympathy, held to his intention of spending the summer in Morocco, but was nearly sure he should return to England in the autumn, with a mind serenely fixed.

"I wish, if you go back to London, you'd look Jenny up," he said.

Sylvia shook her head very decidedly. "I can't imagine anything that would annoy her more, if she's the girl I suppose her to be."

"But I'd like her to have a friend like you," he urged.

Sylvia looked at him severely. "Are you quite sure that you don't want to change her?" she asked.

"Of course. Why?"

"Choosing friends for somebody else is not very wise; it sounds uncommonly like a roundabout way of developing her. No, no, I won't meet your Jenny."

"I see what you mean," Avery assented. "I'll write to Michael and tell him I've met you. Shall I tell him about Lily? Where is she now?"

"I don't know. I've never had even a post-card. My fault, really. Yes, you can tell Michael that she's probably quite happy and—no, I don't think there's any other message. Oh yes, you might say I've eaten one or two rose-leaves but not enough yet."

Avery looked puzzled.

"Apuleius," she added.

"Strange girl. I *wish* you would go and see Jenny."

"Oh no! She's eaten all the rose-leaves she wants, and I'm sure she's not the least interested in Apuleius."

Next day Sylvia and Mrs. Gainsborough set out on the return journey to Tangier, which, apart from a disastrous attempt by Mrs. Gainsborough to eat a prickly pear, lacked incident.

"Let sleeping pears lie," said Sylvia.

"Well, you don't expect a fruit to be so savage," retorted Mrs. Gainsborough. "I thought I must have aggravated a wasp. Talk about nettles. They're chammy leather beside them. Prickly pears! I suppose the next thing I try to eat will be stabbing apples."

They went home by Gibraltar, where Mrs. Gainsborough was delighted to see English soldiers.

"It's nice to know we've got our eyes open even in Spain. I reckon I'll get a good cup of tea here."

They reached England at the end of April, and Sylvia decided to stay for a while at Mulberry Cottage. Reading through *The Stage*, she found that Jack Airdale was resting at Richmond in his old rooms, and went down to see him. He was looking somewhat thin and worried.

"Had rather a rotten winter," he told her. "I got ill with a quinsey and had to throw up a decent shop, and somehow or other I haven't managed to get another one yet."

"Look here, old son," Sylvia said, "I don't want any damned pride from you. I've got plenty of money at present. You've got to borrow fifty pounds. You want feeding up and fitting out. Don't be a cad now, and refuse a 'lidy.' Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! You know me by this time. Who's going to be more angry, you at being lent money or me at being refused by one of the few, the very few, mark you, good pals I've got? Don't be a beast, Jack. You've got to take it."

He surrendered, from habit. Sylvia gave him all her news, but the item that interested him most was her having half taken up the stage.

"I knew you'd make a hit," he declared.

"But I didn't."

"My dear girl, you don't give yourself a chance. You can't play hide and seek with the public, though, by Jove!" he added, ruefully, "I have been lately."

"For the present I can afford to wait."

"Yes, you're damned lucky in one way, and yet I'm not sure that you aren't really very unlucky. If you hadn't found some money you'd have been forced to go on."

"My dear lad, lack of money wouldn't make me an artist."

"What would, then?"

"Oh, I don't know. Being fed up with everything. That's what drove me into self-expression, as I should call it if I were a temperamental miss with a light-boiled ego swimming in a saucepan of emotion for the public to swallow or myself to crack. But conceive my disgust! There was I yearning unattainable 'isms' from a soul nurtured on tragic disillusionment, and I was applauded for singing French songs with an English accent. No, seriously, I shall try again, old Jack, when I receive another buffet. At present I'm just dimly uncomfortable. I shall blossom late like a chrysanthemum. I ain't no daffodil, I ain't. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that I was forced when young—don't giggle, you ribald ass, not that way—and I've got to give myself a rest before I bloom, *en plein air*."

"But you really have got plenty of money?" Airdale inquired, anxiously.

"Masses! Cataracts! And all come by perfectly honest. No, seriously, I've got about four thousand pounds."

"Well, I really do think you're rather lucky, you know."

"Of course. But it's all written in the book of Fate. Listen. I've got a mulberry mark on my arm; I live at Mulberry Cottage; and Morera, that's the name of my fairy godfather, is Spanish for mulberry-tree. Can you beat it?"

"I hope you've invested this money," said Airdale.

"It's in a bank."

He begged her to be careful of her riches, and she rallied him on his inconsistency, because a moment back he had been telling her that their possession was hindering her progress in art.

"My dear Sylvia, I haven't known you for five years not to have discovered that I might as well advise a schoolmaster as you, but what *are* you going to do?"

"Plans for this summer? A little gentle reading. A little browsing among the classics. A little theater-going. A little lunching at Verrey's with Mr. John Airdale. Resting address, six Rosetree Terrace, Richmond, Surrey. A little bumming around town, as Señor Morera would say. Plans for the autumn? A visit to the island of Sirene, if I can find a nice lady-like young woman to accompany me. Mrs. Gainsborough has decided that she will travel no more. Her brain is bursting with unrelated adventure."

"But you can't go on from month to month like that."

"Well, if you'll tell me how to skip over December, January, and August I'll be grateful," Sylvia laughed.

"No, don't rag about. I mean for the future in general," he explained. "Are you going to get married? You can't go on forever like this."

"Why not?"

"Well, you're young now. But what's more gloomy than a restless old maid?"

"My dear man, don't you fret about my withering. I've got a little crystal flask of the finest undiluted strychnine. I believe strychnine quickens the action of the heart. Verdict. Death from attempted galvanization of the cardiac muscles. No flowers by request. Boomph! as Mrs. Gainsborough would say. Ring off. The last time I wrote myself an epitaph it led me into matrimony. *Absit omen.*"

Airdale was distressed by Sylvia's joking about her death, and begged her to stop.

"Then don't ask me any more about the future in general. And now let's go and be Epicurean at Verrey's."

After Jack Airdale the only other old friend that Sylvia took any trouble to find was Olive Fanshawe. She was away on tour when Sylvia returned to England, but she came back to London in June, was still unmarried, and had been promised a small part in the *Vanity* production that autumn. Sylvia found that Olive had recaptured her romantic ideals and was delighted with her proposal that they should live together at Mulberry Cottage. Olive took very seriously her small part at the *Vanity*, of which the most distinguished line was: "Girls, have you seen the Duke of Mayfair? He's awfully handsome." Sylvia was not very encouraging to Olive's opportunities of being able to give an original reading of such a line, but she listened patiently to her variations in which each word was overaccentuated in turn. Luckily there was also a melodious quintet consisting of the juvenile lead and four beauties of whom Olive was to be one; this, it seemed, promised to be a hit, and indeed it was.

The most interesting event for the *Vanity* world that autumn, apart from the individual successes and failures in the new production, was the return of Lord and Lady Clarehaven to London, and not merely their return, but their re-entry into the Bohemian society from which Lady Clarehaven had so completely severed herself.

"I know it's perfectly ridiculous of me," said Olive, "but, Sylvia, do you know, I'm quite nervous at the idea of meeting her again."

A most cordial note had arrived from Dorothy inviting Olive to lunch with her in Curzon Street.

"Write back and tell her you're living with me," Sylvia advised. "That'll choke off some of the friendliness."

But to Sylvia's boundless surprise a messenger-boy arrived with an urgent invitation for her to come too.

"Curiouser and curiouser," she murmured. "What does it mean? She surely can't be tired of being a countess already. I'm completely stumped. However, of course we'll put on our clean bibs and go. Don't look so frightened. Olive, if conversation hangs fire at lunch, we'll tickle the footmen."

"I really feel quite faint," said Olive. "My heart's going pitter-pat. Isn't it silly of me?"

Lunch, to which Arthur Lonsdale had also been invited, did nothing to enlighten Sylvia about the Clarehavens' change of attitude. Dorothy, more beautiful than ever and pleasant enough superficially, seemed withal faintly resentful; Clarehaven was in exuberant spirits and evidently enjoying London tremendously. The only sign of tension, well not exactly tension, but slight disaccord, and that was too strong a word, was once when Clarehaven, having been exceptionally rowdy, glanced at Dorothy a swift look of defiance for checking him.

"She's grown as prim as a parlor-maid," said Lonsdale to Sylvia when, after lunch, they had a chance of talking together. "You ought to have seen her on the ancestral acres. My mother, who presides over our place like a Queen Turnip, is without importance beside Dolly, absolutely without importance. It got on Tony's nerves, that's about the truth of it. He never could stand the land. It has the same effect on him as the sea has on some people. Black vomit, coma, and death—what?"

"Dorothy, of course, played the countess in real life as seriously as she would have played her on the stage. She was the star," Sylvia said.

"Star! My dear girl, she was a comet. And the dowager loved her. They used to drive round in a barouche and administer gruel to the village without anesthetics."

"I suppose they kept them for Clarehaven," Sylvia laughed.

"That's it. Of course, I shouted when I saw the state of affairs, having first of all been called in to recover old Lady Clarehaven's reason when she heard that her only child was going to wed a *Vanity* girl. But they loved her. Every frump in the county adored her. It's Tony who insisted on this move to London. He stood it in Devonshire for two and a half years, but the lights of the wicked city—soft music, please—called him, and they've come back. Dolly's fed up to the wide about it. I say, we are a pair of gossips. What's your news?"

"I met Maurice Avery, in Morocco."

"What, Mossy Avery! Not really? Disguised as a slipper, I suppose. Rum bird. He got awfully keen on a little girl at the Orient and tootled her all over town for a while, but I haven't seen him for months. I used to know him rather well at the 'Varsity: he was one of the esthetic push. I say, what's become of Lily?"

"Married to a croupier? Not, really. By Jove! what a time I had over her with Michael Fane's people. His sister, an awfully good sort, put me through a fearful catechism."

"His sister?" repeated Sylvia.

"You know what Michael's doing now? Greatest scream on earth. He's a monk. Some special kind of a monk that sounds like omelette, but isn't. Nothing to be done about it. I buzzed down to see him last year, and he was awfully fed up. I asked him if he couldn't stop monking for a bit and come out for a spin on my new forty-five Shooting Star. He wasn't in uniform, so there's no reason why he shouldn't have come."

"He's in England, now, then?" Sylvia asked.

"No, he got fed up with everybody buzzing down to see what he looked like as a monk, and he's gone off to Chartreuse or Benedictine or somewhere—I know it's the name of a liqueur—somewhere abroad. I wanted him to become a partner in our business, and promised we'd put a jolly little runabout on the market called *The Jovial Monk*, but he wouldn't. Look here, we'd better join the others. Dolly's got her eye on me. I say," he chuckled, in a whisper, "I suppose you know she's a connection of mine?"

"Yes, by carriage."

Lonsdale asked what she meant, and Sylvia told him the origin of Dorothy's name.

"Oh, I say, that's topping. What's her real name?"

"No, no," Sylvia said. "I've been sufficiently spiteful."

"Probably Buggins, really. I say, Cousin Dorothy," he went on, in a louder voice. "What about bridge to-morrow

night after the Empire?"

Lady Clarehaven flashed a look at Sylvia, who could not resist shaking her head and earning thereby another sharper flash. When Sylvia talked over the Clarehavens with Olive, she found that Olive had been quite oblivious of anything unusual in the sudden move to town.

"Of course, Dorothy and I can never be what we were to each other; but I thought they seemed so happy together. I'm so glad it's been such a success."

"Well, has it?" said Sylvia, doubtfully.

"Oh yes, my dear! How can you imagine anything else?"

With the deepening of winter Olive fell ill and the doctors prescribed the Mediterranean for her. The malady was nothing to worry about; it was nothing more than fatigue; and if she were to rest now and if possible not work before the following autumn, there was every reason to expect that she would be perfectly cured.

Sylvia jumped at an excuse to go abroad again and suggested a visit to Sirene. The doctor, on being assured that Sirene was in the Mediterranean, decided that it was exactly the place best suited to Olive's state of health. Like most English doctors, he regarded the Mediterranean as a little larger than the Serpentine, with a characteristic climate throughout. Olive, however, was much opposed to leaving London, and when Sylvia began to get annoyed with her obstinacy, she confessed that the real reason for wishing to stay was Jack.

"Naturally, I wanted to tell you at once, my dear. But Jack wouldn't let me, until he could see his way clear to our being married. He was quite odd about you, for you know how fond he is of you—he thinks there's nobody like you—but he particularly asked me not to tell you just yet."

"Of course I know the reason," Sylvia proclaimed, instantly. "The silly, scrupulous, proud ass. I'll have it out with him to-morrow at lunch. Dearest Olive, I'm so happy that I like your curly-headed actor."

"Oh, but, darling Sylvia, his hair's quite straight!"

"Yes, but it's very long and gets into his eyes. It's odd hair, anyway. And when did the flaming arrow pin your two hearts together?"

"It was that evening you played baccarat at Curzon Street—about ten days ago. You didn't think we'd known long, did you? Oh, my dear, I couldn't have kept the secret any longer."

Next day Sylvia lunched with Jack Airdale and came to the point at once.

"Look here, you detestably true-to-type, impossibly sensitive ass, because I to please me lent you fifty pounds, is that any excuse for you to keep me out in the cold over you and Olive? Seriously, Jack, I do think it was mean of you."

Jack was abashed and mumbled many excuses. He had been afraid Sylvia would despise him for talking about marriage when he owed her money. He felt, anyway, that he wasn't good enough for Olive. Before Olive had known anything about it, he had been rather ashamed of himself for being in love with her; he felt he was taking advantage of Sylvia's friendship.

"All which excuses are utterly feeble," Sylvia pronounced. "Now listen. Olive's ill. She ought to go abroad. I very selfishly want a companion. You've got to insist on her going. The fifty pounds I lent you will pay her expenses, so that debt's wiped out, and you're standing her a holiday in the Mediterranean."

Jack thought for a moment with a puzzled air.

"Don't be absurd, Sylvia. Really for the moment you took me in with your confounded arithmetic. Why, you're doubling the obligation."

"Obligation! Obligation! Don't you dare to talk about obligations to me. I don't believe in obligations. Am I to understand that for the sake of your unworthy—well, it can't be dignified with the word—pride, Olive is to be kept in London throughout the spring?"

Jack protested he had been talking about the loan to himself. Olive's obligation would be a different one.

"Jack, have you ever seen a respectable woman throw a sole Morny across a restaurant? Because you will in one moment. Amen to the whole discussion. Please! The only thing you've got to do is to insist on Olive's coming with me. Then while she's away you must be a good little actor and act away as hard as you know how, so that you can be married next June as a present to me on my twenty-sixth birthday."

"You're the greatest dear," said Jack, fervently.

"Of course I am. But I'm waiting."

"What for?"

"Why, for an exhortation to matrimony. Haven't you noticed that people who are going to get married always try to persuade everybody else to come in with them? I'm sure human co-operation began with paleolithic bathers."

So Olive and Sylvia left England for Sirene.

"I'd like to be coming with you," said Mrs. Gainsborough at Charing Cross. "But I'm just beginning to feel a tiddley-bit stiff, and well, there, after Morocco, I shouldn't be satisfied with anything less than a cannibal island, and it's too late for me to start in being a Robinson Crusoe, which reminds me that when I took Mrs. Beardmore to the Fulham pantomime last night it was Dick Whittington. And upon my soul, if he didn't go to Morocco with his cat. 'Well,' I said to Mrs. Beardmore, 'it's not a bit like it.' I told her that if Dick Whittington went there now he wouldn't take his cat with him. He'd take a box of Keating's. Somebody behind said, 'Hush.' And I said, 'Hush yourself. Perhaps *you've* been to Morocco?' Which made him look very silly, for I don't suppose he's ever been further East than Aldgate in his life. We had no more 'hushes' from him, I can tell you; and Mrs. Beardmore looked round at him in a very lady-like way which she's got from being a housekeeper, and said, 'My friend *has* been to Morocco.' After that we la-la'd the chorus in peace and quiet. Good-by, duckies, and don't gallivant about too much."

Sylvia had brought a bagful of books about the Roman emperors, and Olive had brought a number of anthologies that made up by the taste of the binder for the lack of it in the compiler. They were mostly about love. To satisfy Sylvia's historical passion a week was spent in Rome and another week in Naples. She told Olive of her visit to Italy with Philip over seven years ago, and, much to her annoyance, Olive poured out a good deal of emotion over that hapless marriage.

"Don't you feel any kind of sentimental regret?" she asked while they were watching from Posilipo the vapors of Vesuvius rose-plumed in the wintry sunset. "Surely you feel softened toward it all now. Why, I think I should regret



anything that had once happened in this divinely beautiful place."

"The thing I remember most distinctly is Philip's having read somewhere that the best way to get rid of an importunate guide was to use the local negative and throw the head back instead of shaking it. The result was that Philip used to walk about as if he were gargling. To annoy him I used to wink behind his back at the guides, and naturally with such encouragement his local negative was absolutely useless."

"I think you must have been rather trying, Sylvia dear."

"Oh, I was—infernally trying, but one doesn't marry a child of seventeen as a sedative."

"I think it's all awfully sad," Olive sighed.

Sylvia had rather a shock, a few days after they had reached Sirene, when she saw Miss Horne and Miss Hobart drive past on the road up to Anasirene, the green rival of Sirene among the clouds to the west of the island. She made inquiries at the pension and was informed that two sisters Miss Hobart-Horne, English millionaires many times over, had lived at Sirene these five years. Sylvia decided that it would be quite easy to avoid meeting them, and warned Olive against making friends with any of the residents, on the plea that she did not wish to meet people whom she had met here seven years ago with her husband. In the earlier part of the spring they stayed at a pension, but Sylvia found that it was difficult to escape from people there, and they moved up to Anasirene, where they took a *villino* that was cut off from all dressed-up humanity by a sea of olives. Here it was possible to roam by paths that were not frequented save by peasants whose personalities so long attuned to earth had lost the power of detaching themselves from the landscape and did not affect the onlooker more than the movement of trees or the rustle of small beasts. Life was made up of these essentially undisturbing personalities set in a few pictures that escaped from the swift southern spring: anemones splashed out like wine upon the green corn; some girl with slanting eyes that regarded coldly a dead bird in her thin brown hand; red-beaded cherry-trees that threw shadows on the tawny wheat below; wind over the olives and the sea, wind that shook the tresses of the broom and ruffled the scarlet poppies; then suddenly the first cicala and eternal noon.

It would have been hard to say how they spent these four months, Sylvia thought.

"Can you bear to leave your beloved trees, your namesakes?" she asked.

"Jack is getting impatient," said Olive.

"Then we must fade out of Anasirene just as one by one the flowers have all faded."

"I don't think I've faded much," Olive laughed. "I never felt so well in my life, thanks to you."

Jack and Olive were married at the end of June. It was necessary to go down to a small Warwickshire town and meet all sorts of country people that reminded Sylvia of Green Lanes. Olive's father, who was a solicitor, was very anxious for Sylvia to stay when the wedding was over. He was cheating the gods out of half their pleasure in making him a solicitor by writing a history of Warwickshire worthies. Sylvia had so much impressed him as an intelligent observer that he would have liked to retain her at his elbow for a while. She would not stay, however. The particular song that the sirens had sung to her during her sojourn in their territory was about writing a book. They called her back now and flattered her with a promise of inspiration. Sylvia was not much more ready to believe in sirens than in mortals, and she resisted the impulse to return. Nevertheless, with half an idea of scoring off them by writing the book somewhere else, she settled down in Mulberry Cottage to try: the form should be essays, and she drew up a list of subjects:—

1. *Obligations.*

*Judiac like the rest of our moral system; post obits on human gratitude.*

2. *Friendship.*

*A flowery thing. Objectionable habit of keeping pressed flowers.*

3. *Marriage.*

*Judiac. Include this with obligations; nothing wrong with the idea of marriage. The marriage of convenience probably more honest than the English marriage of so-called affection. Levi the same as Lewis.*

4. *Gambling.*

*A moral occupation that brings out the worst side of everybody.*

5. *Development.*

*Exploiting human personality. Judiac, of course.*

6. *Acting.*

*A low art form; oh yes, very low; being paid for what the rest of the world does for nothing.*

7. *Prostitution.*

*Selling one's body to keep one's soul. This is the meaning of the sins that were forgiven to the woman because she loved much. One might say of most marriages that they were selling one's soul to keep one's body.*

Sylvia found that when she started to write on these and other subjects she knew nothing about them; the consequence was that summer passed into autumn and autumn into winter while she went on reading history and philosophy. For pastime she played baccarat at Curzon Street and lost six hundred pounds. In February she decided that, so much having been written on the subjects she had chosen, it was useless to write any more. She went to stay with Jack and Olive, who were now living in West Kensington. Olive was expecting a baby in April.

"If it's a boy, we're going to call him Sylvius. But if it's a girl, Jack says we can't call her Sylvia, because for us there can never be more than one Sylvia."

"Call her Argentina."

"No, we're going to call her Sylvia Rose."

"Well, I hope it'll be a boy," said Sylvia. "Anyway, I hope it'll be a boy, because there are too many girls."

Olive announced that she had taken a cottage in the country close to where her people lived, and that Sylvius or Sylvia Rose was to be born there; she thought it was right.

"I don't know why childbirth should be more moral in the country," Sylvia said.

"Oh, it's nothing to do with morals; it's on account of baby's health. You will come and stay with me, won't you?"

In March, therefore, Sylvia went down to Warwickshire with Olive, much to the gratification of Mr. Fanshawe. It was a close race whether he would be a grandfather or an author first, but in the end Mr. Fanshawe had the pleasure of placing a copy of his work on Warwickshire worthies in the hands of the monthly nurse before she could place in his arms a grandchild. Three days later Olive brought into the world a little girl and a little boy. Jack was acting in Dundee. The problem of nomenclature was most complicated. Olive had to think it all out over again from the beginning. Jack had to be consulted by telegram about every change, and on occasions where accuracy was all-important, the post-office clerks were usually most careless. For instance, Mr. Fanshawe thought it would be charming to celebrate the forest of Arden by calling the children Orlando and Rosalind; Jack thereupon replied:

Do not like Rosebud. What will boy be called. Suggest Palestine. First name arrived Ostend. If Oswald no.

"Palestine!" exclaimed Olive.

"Obviously Valentine," said Sylvia. "But look here, why not Sylvius for the boy and Rose for the girl? 'Rose Airdale, all were thine!'"

When several more telegrams had been exchanged to enable Olive, in Warwickshire, to be quite sure that Jack, by this time in Aberdeen, had got the names right, Sylvius and Rose were decided upon, though Mr. Fanshawe advocated Audrey for the girl with such pertinacity that he even went as far as to argue with his daughter on the steps of the font. Indeed, as Sylvia said afterward, if the clergyman had not been so deaf, Rose would probably be Audrey at this moment.

On the afternoon of the christening Sylvia received a telegram.

"Too late," she said, with a laugh, as she tore it open. "He can't change his mind now."

But the telegram was signed "Beardmore" and asked Sylvia to come at once to London because Mrs. Gainsborough was very ill.

When she arrived at Mulberry Cottage, on a fine morning in early June, Mrs. Beardmore, whom Sylvia had never seen, was gravely accompanying two other elderly women to the garden door.

"She's not dead?" Sylvia cried.

The three friends shook their heads and sighed.

"Not yet, poor soul," said the thinnest, bursting into tears.

This must be Mrs. Ewings.

"I'm just going to send another doctor," said the most majestic, which must be Mrs. Marsham.

Mrs. Beardmore said nothing, but she sniffed and led the way toward the house. Mrs. Marsham and Mrs. Ewings went off together.

Inside the darkened room, but not so dark in the June sunshine as to obscure entirely the picture of Captain Dashwood in whiskers that hung upon the wall by her bed, Mrs. Gainsborough lay breathing heavily. The nurse made a gesture of silence and came out tiptoe from the room. Down-stairs in the parlor Sylvia listened to Mrs. Beardmore's story of the illness.

"I heard nothing till three days ago, when the woman who comes in of a morning ascertained from Mrs. Gainsborough the wish she had for me to visit her. The Misses Hargreaves, with whom I reside, was exceptionally kind and insisted upon me taking the tram from Kew that very moment. I communicated with Mrs. Marsham and Mrs. Ewings, but they, both having lodgers, was unable to evacuate their business, and Mrs. Gainsborough was excessively anxious as you should be communicated with on the telegraph, which I did accordingly. We have two nurses night and day, and the doctor is all that can be desired, all that can be desired, notwithstanding whatever Mrs. Marsham may say to the contrary; Mrs. Marsham, who I've known for some years, has that habit of contradicting everybody else something outrageous. Mrs. Ewings and me was both entirely satisfied with Doctor Barker. I'm very glad you've come, Miss Scarlett, and Mrs. Gainsborough will be very glad you've come. If you'll permit the liberty of the observation, Mrs. Gainsborough is very fond of you. As soon as she wakes up I shall have to get back to Kew, not wishing to trespass too much on the kindness of the two Misses Hargreaves to whom I act as housekeeper. It's her heart that's the trouble. Double pneumonia through pottering in the garden. That's what the doctor diag—yes, that's what the doctor says, and though Mrs. Marsham contradicted him, taking the words out of his mouth and throwing them back in his face, and saying it was nothing of the kind but going to the King's funeral, I believe he's right."

Mrs. Beardmore went back to Kew. Mrs. Gainsborough, who had been in a comatose state all the afternoon, began to wander in her mind about an hour before sunset.

"It's very dark. High time the curtain went up. The house will be getting impatient in a minute. It's not to be supposed they'll wait all night. Certainly not."

Sylvia drew the curtains back, and the room was flooded with gold.

"That's better. Much better. The country smells beautiful, don't it, this morning? The glory die-johns are a treat this year, but the captain he always likes a camellia or a gardenia. Well, if they start in building over your nursery, pa... Certainly not, certainly not. They'll build over everything. Now don't talk about dying, Bob. Don't let's be dismal on our anniversary. Certainly not."

She suddenly recognized Sylvia and her mind cleared.

"Oh, I *am* glad you've come. Really, you know, I hate to make a fuss, but I'm not feeling at all meself. I'm just a tiddley-bit ill, it's my belief. Sylvia, give me your hand. Sylvia, I'm joking. I really am remarkably ill. Oh, there's no doubt I'm going to die. What a beautiful evening! Yes, it's not to be supposed I'm going to live forever, and there, after all, I'm not sorry. As soon as I began to get that stiffness I thought it meant I was not meself. And what's the good of hanging about if you're not yourself?"

The nurse came forward and begged her not to talk too much.

"You can't stop me talking. There was a clergyman came through Mrs. Ewings's getting in a state about me, and he talked till I was sick and tired of the sound of his voice. Talked away, he did, about the death of Our Lord and being nailed to the cross. It made me very dismal. 'Here, when did all this occur?' I asked. 'Nineteen hundred and

ten years ago,' he said. 'Oh well,' I said, 'it all occurred such a long time ago and it's all so sad, let's hope it never occurred at all.'"

The nurse said firmly that if Mrs. Gainsborough would not stop talking she should have to make Sylvia go out of the room.

"There's a tyrant," said Mrs. Gainsborough. "Well, just sit by me quietly and hold my hand."

The sun set behind the housetops. Mrs. Gainsborough's hand was cold when twilight came.

Sylvia felt that it was out of the question to stay longer at Mulberry Cottage, though Miss Dashwood, to whom the little property reverted, was very anxious for her to do so. After the funeral Sylvia joined Olive and Jack in Warwickshire.

They realized that she was feeling very deeply the death of Mrs. Gainsborough, and were anxious that she should arrange to live with them in West Kensington.

Sylvia, however, said that she wished to remain friends with them, and declined the proposal.

"Do you remember what I told you once," she said to Jack, "about going back to the stage in some form or another when I was tired of things?"

Jack, who had not yet renounced his ambition for Sylvia's theatrical career, jumped at the opportunity of finding her an engagement, and when they all went back to London with the babies he rushed about the Strand to see what was going. Sylvia moved all her things from Mulberry Cottage to the Airdales' house, refusing once more Miss Dashwood's almost tearful offer to make over the cottage to her. She was sorry to withstand the old lady, who was very frail by now, but she knew that if she accepted, it would mean more dreaming about writing books and gambling at Curzon Street, and ultimately doing nothing until it was too late.

"I'm reaching the boring idle thirties. I'm twenty-seven," she told Jack and Olive. "I must sow a few more wild oats before my face is plowed with wrinkles to receive the respectable seeds of a flourishing old age. By the way, as demon-godmother I've placed one thousand pounds to the credit of Rose and Sylvius."

The parents protested, but Sylvia would take no denial.

"I've kept lots for myself," she assured them. As a matter of fact, she had nearly another £1,000 in the bank.

At the end of July Jack came in radiant to say that a piece with an English company was being sent over to New York the following month. There was a small part for which the author required somebody whose personality seemed to recall Sylvia's. Would she read it? Sylvia said she would.

"The author was pleased, eh?" Jack asked, enthusiastically, when Sylvia came back from the trial.

"I don't really know. Whenever he tried to speak, the manager said, 'One moment, please'; it was like a boxing-match. However, as the important thing seemed to be that I should speak English with a French accent, I was engaged."

Sylvia could not help being amused at herself when she found that her first essay with legitimate drama was to be the exact converse of her first essay with the variety stage, dependent, as before, upon a kind of infirmity. Really, the only time she had been able to express herself naturally in public had been when she sang "The Raggle-taggle Gipsies" with the Pink Pierrots, and that had been a failure. However, a tour in the States would give her a new glimpse of life, which at twenty-seven was the important consideration; and perhaps New York, more generous than other capitals, would give her life itself, or one of the only two things in life that mattered, success and love.

### CHAPTER XIII

THE play in which Sylvia was to appear in New York was called "A Honeymoon in Europe," and if it might be judged from the first few rehearsals, at which the performers had read their parts like half-witted board-school children, it was thin stuff. Still, it was not fair to pass a final opinion without the two American stars who were awaiting the English company in their native land.

The author, Mr. Marchmont Hearne, was a timid little man who between the business manager and producer looked and behaved very much like the Dormouse at the Mad Tea-party. The manager did not resemble the Hatter except in the broad brim of his top-hat, which in mid-Atlantic he reluctantly exchanged for a cloth cap. The company declared he was famous for his tact; certainly he managed to suppress the Dormouse at every point by shouting, "One minute, Mr. Stern, *please*," or, "Please, Mr. Burns, one minute," and apologizing at once so effusively for not calling him by his right name that the poor little Dormouse had no courage to contest the real point at issue, which had nothing to do with his name. When the manager had to exercise a finer tactfulness, as with obdurate actresses, he was wont to soften his remarks by adding that nothing "derogatory" had been intended; this seemed to mollify everybody, probably, Sylvia thought, because it was such a long word. The Hatter's name was Charles Fitzherbert. The producer, Mr. Wade Fortescue, by the length of his ears, by the way in which his electrical hair propelled itself into a peak on either side of his head, and by his wild, artistic eye, was really rather like the March Hare outwardly; his behavior was not less like. Mr. Fortescue's attitude toward "A Honeymoon in Europe" was one that Beethoven might have taken up on being invited to orchestrate "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay." The author did not go so far as to resent this attitude, but on many occasions he was evidently pained by it, notwithstanding Mr. Fitzherbert's assurances that Mr. Fortescue had intended nothing "derogatory."

Sylvia's part was that of a French chambermaid. The author had drawn it faithfully to his experience of Paris in the course of several week-ends. As his conception coincided with that of the general public in supposing a French chambermaid to be a cross between a street-walker and a tight-rope walker, it seemed probable that the part would be a success; although Mr. Fortescue wanted to mix the strain still further by introducing the blood of a comic ventriloquist.

"You must roll your 'r's' more, Miss Scarlett," he assured her. "That line will go for nothing as you said it."

"I said it as a French chambermaid would say it," Sylvia insisted.

"If I might venture—" the Dormouse began.

"One minute, please, Mr. Treherne," interrupted the Mad Hatter. "What Mr. Fortescue wants, Miss Scarlett, is

exaggeration—a leetle exaggeration. I believe that is what you want, Mr. Fortescue?”

“I don’t want a caricature,” snapped the March Hare. “The play is farcical enough as it is. What I want to impart is realism. I want Miss Scarlett to say the line as a French girl would say it.”

“Precisely,” said the Hatter. “That’s precisely what I was trying to explain to Miss Scarlett. You’re a bit hasty, old chap, you know, and I think you frightened her a little. That’s all right, Miss Scarlett, there’s nothing to be frightened about. Mr. Fortescue intended nothing derogatory.”

“I’m not in the least frightened,” said Sylvia, indignantly.

“If I might make a suggestion, I think that—” the Dormouse began.

“One minute please, please, Mr. Burns, one minute—Ah, dear me, Mr. Hearne, I was confusing you with the poet. Nothing derogatory in that, eh?” he laughed jovially.

“May I ask a question?” said Sylvia, and asked it before Mr. Fitzherbert could interrupt again. “Why do all English authors draw all Frenchwomen as cocottes and all French authors draw all English women as governesses? The answer’s obvious.”

The Mad Hatter and the March Hare were so much taken aback by this attack from Alice that the Dormouse was able to emit an entire sentence.

“I should like to say that Miss Scarlett’s rendering of the accent gives me great satisfaction. I have no fault to find. I shall be much obliged, Miss Scarlett, if you will correct my French whenever necessary. I am fully sensible of its deficiencies.”

Mr. Marchmont Hearne blinked after this challenge and breathed rather heavily.

“I’ve had a good deal of experience,” said Mr. Fortescue, grimly, “but I never yet found that it improved a play to allow the performers of minor rôles, essentially minor rôles, to write their parts in at rehearsal.”

Mr. Fitzherbert was in a quandary for a moment whether he should smoothe the rufflings of the author or of the actress or of the producer, but deciding that the author could be more profitable to his career in the end, he took him up-stage and tried to whisper away Mr. Fortescue’s bad temper. In the end Sylvia was allowed to roll her “r’s” at her own pace.

“I’m glad you stood up to him, dear,” said an elderly actress like a pink cabbage rose fading at the tips of the petals, who had been sitting throughout the rehearsal so nearly on the scene that she was continually being addressed in mistake by people who really were “on.” The author, who had once or twice smiled at her pleasantly, was evidently under the delusion that she was interested in his play.

“Yes, I was delighted with the way you stood up to them,” continued Miss Nancy Tremayne. “My part’s wretched, dear. All feeding! Still, if I’m allowed to slam the door when I go off in the third act, I may get a hand. Have you ever been to New York before? I like it myself, and you can live quite cheaply if you know the ropes. Of course, I’m drawing a very good salary, because they wanted me. I said I couldn’t come for a penny under one hundred dollars, and I really didn’t want to come at all. However, he *would* have me, and between you and me, I’m really rather glad to have the chance of saving a little money. The managers are getting very stingy in England. Don’t tell anybody what I’m getting, will you, dear? One doesn’t like to create jealousy at the commencement of a tour. It seems to be quite a nice crowd, though the girls look a little old, don’t you think? Amy Melhuish, who’s playing the ingénue, must be at least thirty. It’s wonderful how some women have the nerve to go on. I gave up playing ingénues as soon as I was over twenty-eight, and that’s four years ago now, or very nearly. Oh dear, how time flies!”

Sylvia thought that, if Miss Tremayne was only twenty-eight four years ago, time must have crawled.

“They’re sending us out in the *Minneworra*. The usual economy, but really in a way it’s nicer, because it’s all one class. Yes, I’m glad you stood up to them, dear. Fortescue’s been impossible ever since he produced one of those filthy Strindberg plays last summer for the Unknown Plays Committee. I hate this continental muck. Degenerate, I say it is. In my opinion Ibsen has spoiled the drama in England. What do you think of Charlie Fitzherbert? He’s such a nice man. Always ready to smooth over any little difficulties. When Mr. Vernon said to me that Charlie would be coming with us, I felt quite safe.”

“Morally?” Sylvia asked.

“Oh, go on! You know what I mean. Comfortable, and not likely to be stranded. Well, I’m always a little doubtful about American productions. I suppose I’m conservative. I like old-fashioned ways.”

Which was not surprising, Sylvia thought.

“Miss Tremayne, I can’t hear myself speak. Are you on in this scene?” demanded the producer.

“I really don’t know. My next cue is—”

“I don’t think Miss Tremayne comes on till Act Three,” said the author.

“We sha’n’t get there for another two hours,” the producer growled.

Miss Tremayne moved her chair back three feet, and turned to finish her conversation with Sylvia.

“What I was going to say when I was interrupted, dear, was that, if you’re a bad sailor, you ought to make a point of making friends with the purser. Unfortunately I don’t know the purser on the *Minneworra*, but the purser on the *Minnetoota* was quite a friend of mine, and gave me a beautiful deck-cabin. The other girls were very jealous.”

“Damn it, Miss Tremayne, didn’t I ask you not to go on talking?” the producer shouted.

“Nice gentlemanly way of asking anybody not to whisper a few words of advice, isn’t it?” said Miss Tremayne, with a scathing glance at Mr. Fortescue as she moved her chair quite six feet farther away from the scene.

“Now, of course, we’re in a draught,” she grumbled to Sylvia. “But I always say that producers never have any consideration for anybody but themselves.”

By the time the S.S. *Minneworra* reached New York Sylvia had come to the conclusion that the representatives of the legitimate drama differed only from the chorus of a musical comedy in taking their temperaments and exits more seriously. Sylvia’s earlier experience had led her to suppose that the quantity of make-up and proximity to the footlights were the most important things in art.

Whatever hopes of individual ability to shine the company might have cherished before it reached New York were quickly dispelled by the two American stars, up to whom and not with whom they were expected to twinkle. Mr.

Diomed Olver and Miss Marcia Neville regarded the rest of the company as Jupiter and Venus might regard the Milky Way. Miss Tremayne's exit upon a slammed door was forbidden the first time she tried it, because it would distract the attention of the audience from Miss Neville, who at that moment would be sustaining a dimple, which she called holding a situation. This dimple, which was famous from Boston to San Francisco, from Buffalo to New Orleans, had, when Miss Neville first swam into the ken of a manager's telescope, been easy enough to sustain. Of late years a slight tendency toward stoutness had made it necessary to assist the dimple with the forefinger and internal suction; the slamming of a door might disturb so nice an operation, and an appeal, which came oddly from Miss Neville, was made to Miss Tremayne's sense of natural acting.

Mr. Olver did not bother to conceal his intention of never moving from the center of the stage, where he maintained himself with the noisy skill of a gyroscope.

"See here," he explained to members of the company who tried to compete with his stellar supremacy. "The public pays to see Diomed Olver and Marcia Neville; they don't care a damned cent for anything else in creation. Got me? That's good. Now we'll go along together fine."

Mr. Charles Fitzherbert assisted no more at rehearsals, but occupied himself entirely with the box-office. Mr. Wade Fortescue was very fierce about 2 A.M. in the bar of his hotel, but very mild at rehearsals. Mr. Marchmont Hearne hibernated during this period, and when he appeared very shyly at the opening performance in Brooklyn the company greeted him with the surprised cordiality that is displayed to some one who has broken his leg and emerges weeks later from hospital without a limp.

New York made a deep and instant impression on Sylvia. No city that she had seen was so uncompromising; so sure of its flamboyant personality; so completely an ingenious, spoiled, and precocious child; so lovable for its extravagance and mischief. To her the impression was of some Gargantuan boy in his nursery building up tall towers to knock them down, running his clockwork-engines for fun through the streets of his toy city, scattering in corners quantities of toy bricks in readiness for a new fit of destructive construction, scooping up his tin inhabitants at the end of a day's play to put them helter-skelter into their box, eking out the most novel electrical toys of that Christmas with the battered old trams of the Christmas before, cherishing old houses with a child's queer conservatism, devoting a large stretch of bright carpet to a park, and robbing his grandmother's mantelpiece of her treasures to put inside his more permanent structures. After seeing New York she sympathized very much with the remark she had heard made by a young New-Yorker on board the *Minneworra*, which at the time she had thought a mere callow piece of rudeness.

A grave doctor from Toledo, Ohio, almost as grave as if he were from the original Toledo, had expressed a hope to Sylvia that she would not accept New York as representative of the United States. She must travel to the West. New York had no family life. If Miss Scarlett wished to see family life, he should be glad to show it to her in Toledo. For confirmation of his criticism he had appealed to a young man standing at his elbow.

"Well," the young man had replied, "I've never been fifty miles west of New York in my life, and I hope I never shall. When I want to travel I cross over to Europe for a month."

The Toledo doctor had afterward spoken severely to Sylvia on the subject of this young New-Yorker, citing him as a dangerous element in the national welfare. Now, after seeing the Gargantuan boy's nursery, she understood the spirit that wanted to enjoy his nursery and not be bothered to go for polite walks with maiden aunts in the country; equally, no doubt, in Toledo she should appreciate the point of view of the doctor and recognize the need for the bone that would support the vast bulk of the growing child.

Sylvia had noticed that as she grew older impressions became less vivid; her later and wider experience of London was already dim beside those first years with her father and Monkley. It had been the same during her travels. Already even the Alhambra was no longer quite clearly imprinted upon her mind, and each year it had been growing less and less easy to be astonished. But this arrival in New York had been like an arrival in childhood, as surprising, as exciting, as terrifying, as stimulating. New York was like a rejuvenating potion in the magic influence of which the memories of past years dissolved. Partly, no doubt, this effect might be ascribed to the invigorating air, and partly, Sylvia thought, to the anxiously receptive condition of herself now within sight of thirty; but neither of these explanations was wide enough to include all that New York gave of regenerative emotion, of willingness to be alive and unwillingness to go to bed, and of zest in being amused. Sylvia had supposed that she had long ago outgrown the pleasure of wandering about streets for no other reason than to be wandering about streets, of staring into shops, of staring after people, of staring at advertisements, of staring in company with a crowd of starers as well entertained as herself at a bat that was flying about in daylight outside the Plaza Hotel; but here in New York all that old youthful attitude of assuming that the world existed for one's diversion, mixed with a sharp, though always essentially contemptuous, curiosity about the method it was taking to amuse one, was hers again. Sylvia had always regarded England as the frivolous nation that thought of nothing but amusement, England that took its pleasure so earnestly and its business so lightly. In New York there was no question of qualifying adverbs; everything was a game. It was a game, and apparently, by the enthusiasm with which it was played, a novel game, to control the traffic in Fifth Avenue—a rather dangerous game like American football, in which at first the casualties to the policemen who played it were considerable. Street-mending was another game, rather an elementary game that contained a large admixture of practical joking. Getting a carriage after the theater was a game played with counters. Eating, even, could be made into a game either mechanical like the automatic dime lunch, or intellectual like the free lunch, or imaginative like the quick lunch.

Sylvia had already made acquaintance with the crude material of America in Carlos Morera. New York was Carlos Morera much more refined and more matured, sweetened by its own civilization, which, having severed itself from other civilizations like the Anglo-Saxon or Latin, was already most convincingly a civilization of its own, bearing the veritable stamp of greatness. Sometimes Sylvia would be faced even in New York by a childishness that scarcely differed from the childishness of Carlos Morera. One evening, for instance, two of the men in the company who knew her tastes invited her to come with them to Murden's all-night saloon off Sixth Avenue. They had been told it was a sight worth seeing. Sylvia, with visions of something like the dancing-saloon in Buenos Aires, was anxious to make the experiment. It sounded exciting when she heard that the place was kept going by "graft." After the performance she and her companions went to Jack's for supper; thence they walked along Sixth Avenue to Murden's. It was only about two o'clock when they entered by a side door into a room exactly like the bar parlor of an English public house, where they sat rather drearily drinking some inferior beer, until one of Sylvia's companions suggested that

they had arrived too near the hours of legal closing. They left Murden's and visited a Chinese restaurant in Broadway with a cabaret attached. The prices, the entertainment, the food, and the company were in a descending scale; the prices were much the highest. Two hours later they went back to Murden's; the parlor was not less dreary; the beer was still abominable. However, just as they had decided that this could not be the right place, an enormous man slightly drunk entered under the escort of two ladies of the town. Perceiving that Sylvia and her companions had risen, the new-comer waved them back into their chairs and called for drinks all round.

"British?" he asked.

They nodded.

"Yes, I thought you were Britishers. I'm Under-Sheriff McMorris." With this he seated himself, hugging the two nymphs on either side of him like a Dionysius in his chariot.

"Actor folk?" he asked.

They nodded.

"Yes, I thought you were actor folk. Ever read Shakespeare? Some boy, eh? Gee! I used to be able to spout Parsha without taking breath."

Forthwith he delivered the speech about the quality of mercy.

"Wal?" he demanded at the end.

The English actors congratulated him and called for another round. Mr. McMorris turned to one of the nymphs:

"Wal, honey?"

"Cut it out, you fat old slob; you're tanked!" said honey.

Mr. McMorris recited several other speeches, including the vision of the dagger from "Macbeth." From Shakespeare he passed to Longfellow, and from Longfellow to Byron. After an hour of recitations he was persuaded by the bartender to give some of his reminiscences of criminals in New York, which he did so vividly that Sylvia began to suppose that at one time or another he really had been connected with the law. Finally about six o'clock he became pathetic and wept away most of what he had drunk.

"I'm feeling bad this morning. I gart to go and arrest a man for whom I have a considerable admiration. I gart to go down-town to Washington Square and arrest a prominent citizen at eight o'clock sharp. I guess they're waiting right now for me to come along and make that arrest. Where's my black-jack?"

He fumbled in his pocket for a leather-covered life-preserver, which he flourished truculently. Leaning upon the shoulders of the nymphs, he waved a farewell and staggered out.

Sylvia asked the bartender what he really was.

"He's Under-Sheriff McMorris. At eight o'clock he's going to arrest a prominent New York citizen for misappropriation of some fund."

That evening in the papers Sylvia read that Under-Sheriff McMorris had burst into tears when ex-Governor Somebody or other had walked down the steps of his house in Washington Square and offered himself to the custody of the law.

"I don't like to have to do this, Mr. Governor," Under-Sheriff McMorris had protested.

"You must do your duty, Mr. Under-Sheriff."

The crowd had thereupon cheered loudly, and the wife of the ex-Governor, dissolved in tears, had waved the Stars and Stripes from an upper window.

"Jug for the ex-Governor and a jag for the under-sheriff," said Sylvia. "If only the same spirit could be applied to minor arrests. That may come. It's wonderful, really, how in this mighty republic they manage to preserve any vestige of personality, but they do."

The play ran through the autumn and went on tour in January. Sylvia did not add much to her appreciation of America in the course of it, because, as was inevitable in the short visits they paid to various towns, she had to depend for intercourse upon the members of the company. She reached New York again shortly before her twenty-eighth birthday. When nearly all her fellow-players returned to England, she decided to stay behind. The first impression she had received of entering upon a new phase of life when she landed in New York had not yet deserted her, and having received an offer from the owner of what sounded, from his description, like a kind of hydropathic establishment to entertain the visitors there during the late summer and fall, she accepted. In August, therefore, she left New York and went to Sulphurville, Indiana.

Sylvia had had glimpses of rural America in Vermont and New Hampshire during the tour; in such a cursory view it had not seemed to differ much from rural England. Now she was going to see rustic America, if a distinction between the two adjectives might be made. At Indianapolis she changed from the great express into a smaller train that deposited her at a railway station consisting of a tumble-down shed. Nobody came out to welcome the train, but the colored porter insisted that this was the junction from which she would ultimately reach Sulphurville and denied firmly Sylvia's suggestion that the engine-driver had stopped here for breath. She was the only passenger who alighted, and she saw the train continue on its way with something near despair. The sun was blazing down. All around was a grasshopper-haunted wilderness of Indian corn. It was the hottest, greenest, flattest, most God-forsaken spot she had ever seen. The heat was so tremendous that she ventured inside the hut for shade. The only sign of life was a bug proceeding slowly across a greasy table. Sylvia went out and wandered round to the other side. Here, fast asleep, was a man dressed in a pair of blue trousers, a neckerchief, and an enormous straw hat. As the trousers reached to his armpits, he was really fully dressed, and Sylvia was able to recognize him as a human being from an illustrated edition she possessed of *Huckleberry Finn*; at the same time, she thought it wiser to let him sleep and returned to the front of the shed. To her surprise, for it seemed scarcely possible that anybody could inhabit the second floor, she perceived a woman with curl-papers, in a spotted green-and-yellow bed-wrapper, looking out of what until now she had supposed to be a gap in the roof caused by decay. Sylvia asked the woman if this was the junction for Sulphurville. She nodded, but vanished from the window before there was time to ask her when the train would arrive.

Sylvia waited for an hour in the heat, and had almost given up hope of ever reaching Sulphurville when suddenly a train arrived, even smaller than the one into which she had changed at Indianapolis, but still considerably larger than any European train. The hot afternoon wore away while this new train puffed slowly deeper and deeper

into rustic America until it reached Bagdad. Hitherto Sylvia had traveled in what was called a parlor-car, but at Bagdad she had to enter a fourth train that did not possess a parlor-car and that really resembled a local train in England, with oil-lamps and semi-detached compartments. At every station between Bagdad and Sulphurville crowds of country folk got in, all of whom were wearing flags and flowers in their buttonholes and were in a state of perspiring festivity. At the last station before Sulphurville the train was invaded by the members of a local band, whose instruments fought for a place as hard as their masters. Sylvia was nearly elbowed out of her seat by an aggressive ophicleide, but an old gentleman opposite with a saxhorn behind him and a euphonium on his knees told her by way of encouragement that the soldiers didn't pass through Indiana every day.

"The last time I saw soldiers like that was during the war," he said, "and I don't allow any of us here will ever see so many soldiers again." He looked round the company defiantly, but nobody seemed inclined to contradict him, and he grunted with disappointment. It seemed hard that the old gentleman's day should end so tamely, but fortunately a young man in the far corner proclaimed it not merely as his opinion, but supported it from inside information, that the regiment was being marched through Indiana like this in order to get it nearer to the Mexican border.

"Shucks!" said the old gentleman, and blew his nose so violently that every one looked involuntarily at one of the brass instruments. "Shucks!" he repeated. Then he smiled at Sylvia, who, sympathizing with the happy close of his day, smiled back just as the train entered the station of Sulphurville.

The Plutonian Hotel, Sulphurville, had presumably been built to appease the same kind of human credulity that created the pump-rooms at Bath or Wiesbaden or Aix-les-Bains. Sylvia had observed that one of the great elemental beliefs of the human race, a belief lost in primeval fog, was that if water with an odd taste bubbled out of the earth, it must necessarily possess curative qualities; if it bubbled forth without a nasty enough taste to justify the foundation of a spa, it was analyzed by prominent chemists, bottled, and sold as a panacea to the great encouragement of lonely dyspeptics with nothing else to read at dinner. In the Middle Ages, and possibly in the classic times of Æsculapius, these natural springs had fortified the spiritual side of man; in late days they served to dilute his spirits. The natural springs at Sulphurville fully justified the erection of the Plutonian Hotel and the lowest depths of mortal credulity, for they had a revolting smell, an exceptionally unpleasant taste, and a high temperature. Everything that balneal ingenuity could suggest had been done, and in case the internal cure was not nasty enough as it was, the first glass of water was prescribed for six o'clock in the morning. Though it was necessary to test human faith by the most arduous and vexatious ordinances for human conduct, lest it might grow contemptuous of the cure, it was equally necessary to prevent boredom, if not of the devotees themselves, at any rate of their families. Accordingly, there was an annex of the ascetic hotel where everybody was driven to bed at eleven by the uncomfortable behavior of the servants, and where breakfast was served not later than seven; this annex possessed a concert-hall, a small theater, a gaming-saloon with not merely roulette, but many apparently childish games of chance that nevertheless richly rewarded the management. Sylvia wondered if there was any moral intention on the part of the proprietors in the way they encouraged gambling, if they wished to accentuate the chances and changes of human life and thereby secure for their clients a religious attitude toward their bodily safety. Certainly at the Plutonian Hotel it was impossible to obtain anything except meals without gambling. In order to buy a cigar or a box of chocolates it was necessary to play dice with the young woman who sold them, with more or less profit to the hotel, according to one's luck. Every morning some new object was on view in the lobby to be raffled that evening. Thus on the fourth night of her stay Sylvia became the owner of a large trunk, the emptiness of which was continuous temptation.

The Plutonian was not merely a resort for gouty Easterners; it catered equally for the uric acid of the West. Sylvia liked the families from the West, particularly the girls with their flowing hair and big felt hats who rode on Kentucky ponies to see smugglers' caves in the hills, conforming invariably to the traditional aspect of the Western belle in the cinema. The boys were not so picturesque; in fact, they scarcely differed from European boys of the same age. The East supplied the exotic note among the children; candy-fed, shrill, and precocious with a queer gnomelike charm, they resembled expensive toys. These visitors to Sulphurville were much more affable with one another than their fellows in Europe would have been in similar circumstances. Sylvia had already noticed that in America stomachic subjects could inspire the dullest conversation; here at the Plutonian the stomach had taken the place of the soul, and it was scarcely an exaggeration to say that in the lounges people rose up to testify in public about their insides.

The morning after Sylvia's arrival the guests were much excited by the visit of the soldiers, who were to camp for a week on the hotel grounds and perform various maneuvers. Sylvia observed that everybody talked as if a troupe of acrobats was going to visit the hotel; nobody seemed to have any idea that the American army served any purpose but the entertainment of the public with gymnastic displays. That afternoon the regiment marched past the hotel to its camping-ground; the band played the "Star-spangled Banner"; all the visitors grouped upon the steps in front clapped their hands; the colonel took off his hat, waved it at the audience, and bowed like a successful author. At first Sylvia considered his behavior undignified and absurd; afterward she rather approved of its friendliness, its absence of pomp and arrogance, its essentially democratic inspiration—in a word, its familiarity.

The proprietor of the Plutonian, a leading political "boss," was so much moved by the strains of the music, the martial bearing of the men, and the opportunity of self-advertisement, that he invited the officers of the regiment to mess free in the hotel during their visit. Everybody praised Mr. O'Halloran's generosity and patriotism, the more warmly because it gave everybody an occasion to commiserate with the officers upon their absurdly small pay. Such commiseration gratified the individual's sense of superiority and made it easy for him to brag about his own success in life. Sylvia resented the business man's point of view about his national army; it was almost as patronizing as an Englishman's attitude to an artist or a German's to a woman or a Frenchman's to anybody but a Frenchman. Snobbishness was only tolerable about the past. Perhaps that was the reason why the Italians were the only really democratic nation she had met so far. The Italians were aristocrats trying to become tradesmen; the rest of mankind were tradesmen striving to appear aristocrats.

Sylvia had sung her songs and was watching the roulette, when a young lieutenant who had been playing with great seriousness turned to her and asked if she was not British.

"We got to know some British officers out in China," he told her. "We couldn't seem to understand them at first, but afterward we found out they were good boys, really. Only the trouble was we were never properly introduced at first, and that worried them some. Say, there's a fellow-countryman of yours sick in Sulphurville. I kind of found out

by accident this morning, because I went into a drug-store and the storekeeper was handing out some medicine to a colored girl who was arguing with him whether she should pay for it. Seems this young Britisher's expecting his remittance. That's a God-awful place to be stranded, Sulphurville."

They chatted for a while together. Sylvia liked the simple good-fellowship of the young American, his inquisitiveness about her reasons for coming to sing at the Plutonian Hotel, and his frank anticipation of any curiosity on her side by telling her all about himself and his career since he left West Point. He was amused by her account of the excitement over the passage of the troops through the villages, and seized the occasion to moralize on the vastness of a country through one state of which a regiment could march and surprise half the inhabitants with their first view of an American soldier.

"Seems kind of queer," he said.

"But very Arcadian," Sylvia added.

When Sylvia went to bed her mind reverted to the young Englishman; at the time she had scarcely taken in the significance of what the officer had told her. Now suddenly the sense of his loneliness and suffering overwhelmed her fancy. She thought of the desolation of that railway junction where she had waited for the train to Sulphurville, of the heat and the grasshoppers and the flat, endless greenery. Even that brief experience of being alone in the heart of America had frightened her. She had not taken heed of the vastness of it while she was traveling with the company, and here at the hotel definitely placed as an entertainer she had a certain security. But to be alone and penniless in Sulphurville, to be ill, moreover, and dependent on the charity of foreigners, so much the more foreign because, though they spoke the same language, they spoke it with strange differences like the people in a dream. The words were the same, but they expressed foreign ideas. Sylvia began to speculate upon the causes that had led to this young Englishman's being stranded in Sulphurville. There seemed no explanation, unless he were perhaps an actor who had been abandoned because he was too ill to travel with the company. At this idea she almost got out of bed to walk through the warm frog-haunted night to his rescue. She became sentimental about him in the dark. It seemed to her that nothing in the world was so pitiable as a sick artist; always the servant of the public's curiosity, he was now the helpless prey of it. He would be treated with the contempt that is accorded to sick animals whose utility is at an end. She visualized him in the care of a woman like the one who had leaned out of that railway shed in a spotted green-and-yellow wrapper. Yet, after all, he might not be a mountebank; there was really no reason to suppose he was anything but poor and lonely, though that was enough indeed.

"I must be getting very old," Sylvia said to herself. "Only approaching senility could excuse this prodigal effusion of what is really almost maternal lust. I've grown out of any inclination to ask myself why I think things or why I do things. I've nothing now but an immense desire to do—do—do. I was beginning to think this desperate determination to be impressed, like a child whose father is hiding conspicuously behind the door, was due to America. It's nothing to do with America; it's myself. It's a kind of moral and mental drunkenness. I know what I'm doing. I'm entirely responsible for my actions. That's the way a drunken man argues. Nobody is so utterly convinced of his rightness and reasonableness and judgment as a drunken man. I might argue with myself till morning that it's ridiculous to excite myself over the prospect of helping an Englishman stranded in Sulphurville, but when, worn out with self-conviction, I fall asleep, I shall wake on tiptoe, as it were. I shall be quite violently awake at once. The fact is I'm absolutely tired of observing human nature. I just want to tumble right into the middle of its confusion and forget how to criticize anybody or anything. What's the good of meeting a drunken man with generalizations about human conduct or direction or progression? He won't listen to generalizations, because drunkenness is the apotheosis of the individual. That's why drunken people are always so earnestly persuasive, so anxious to convince the unintoxicated observer that it is better to walk on all-fours than upright. Eccentricity becomes a moral passion; every drunken man is a missionary of the peculiar. At the present moment I'm in the mental state that, did I possess an honest taste for liquor, would make me get up and uncork the brandy-bottle. It's a kind of defiant self-expression. Oh, that poor young Englishman lying alone in Sulphurville! To-morrow, to-morrow! Who knows? Perhaps I really shall find that I am necessary to somebody. Even as a child I conceived the notion of being indispensable. I want somebody to say to me: 'You! You! What should I have done without you?' I suppose every woman feels that; I suppose that is the maternal instinct. But I don't believe many women can feel it so sharply as I do, because very few women have ever been compelled by circumstances to develop their personalities so early and so fully, and then find that nobody wants that personality. I could cry just at the mere notion of being wanted, and surely this young Englishman, whoever he is, will want me. Oh, Sylvia, Sylvia, you're deliberately working yourself up to an adventure! And who has a better right? Tell me that. That's exactly why I praised the drunkard; he knows how to dodge self-consciousness. Why shouldn't you set out to have an adventure? You shall, my dear. And if you're disappointed? You've been disappointed before. Damn those tree-frogs! Like all croakers, they disturb oblivion. I wonder if he'd like my new trunk. And I wonder how old he is. I'm assuming that he's young, but he may be a matted old tramp."

Sylvia woke next morning, as she had prefigured herself, on tiptoe; at breakfast she was sorry for all the noisy people round her, so important to her was life seeming. She set out immediately afterward to walk along the hot, dusty road to the town, elated by the notion of leaving behind her the restlessness and stark cleanliness of the big hotel. The main street of Sulphurville smelled of straw and dry grain; and if it had not been for the flies she would have found the air sweet enough after the damp exhalations of brimstone that permeated the atmosphere of the Plutonian and its surroundings. The flies, however, tainted everything; not even the drug-store was free from them. Sylvia inquired for the address of the Englishman, and the druggist looked at her sharply. She wondered if he was hoping for the settlement of his account.

"Madden's the name, ain't it?" the druggist asked.

"Madden," she repeated, mechanically. A wave of emotion flooded her mind, receded, and left it strewn with the jetsam of the past. The druggist and the drug-store faded out of her consciousness; she was in Colonial Terrace again, insisting upon Arthur's immediate departure.

"What a little beast I was!" she thought, and a desire came over her to atone for former heartlessness by her present behavior. Then abruptly she realized that the Madden of Sulphurville was not necessarily, or even probably, the Arthur Madden of Hampstead. Yet behind this half-disappointment lay the conviction that it was he. "Which accounts for my unusual excitement," Sylvia murmured. She heard herself calmly asking the storekeeper for his address.

"The Auburn Hotel," she repeated. "Thank you."



The storekeeper seemed inclined to question her further; no doubt he wished to be able to count upon his bill's being paid; but Sylvia hurried from the shop before he could speak.

The Auburn Hotel, Sulphurville, was perhaps not worse than a hotel of the same class would have been in England, but the colored servant added just enough to the prevailing squalor to make it seem worse. When Sylvia asked to see Mr. Madden the colored servant stared at her, wiped her mouth with her apron, and called:

"Mrs. Lebus!"

"Oh, Julie, is that you? What is it you want?" twanged a voice from within that sounded like a cat caught in a guitar.

"You're wanted right now, Mrs. Lebus," the servant called back.

The duet was like a parody of a 'coon song, and Sylvia found herself humming to ragtime:

"Oh, Mrs. Lebus, you're wanted,  
Oh yes, you're wanted, sure you're wanted, Mrs. Lebus,  
You're wanted, you're wanted,  
You're wanted—right now."

Mrs. Lebus was one of those women whose tongues are always hunting, like eager terriers. With evident reluctance she postponed the chase of an artful morsel that had taken refuge in some difficult country at the back of her mouth, and faced the problem of admitting Sylvia to the sick man's room.

"You a relative?" she asked.

Sylvia shook her head.

"Perhaps you've come about his remittance. He told me he was expecting a hundred dollars any time. You staying in Sulphurville?"

Sylvia understood that the apparent disinclination to admit her was only due to unsatisfied curiosity and that there was not necessarily any suspicion of her motives. At this moment something particularly delicious ran across the path of Mrs. Lebus's tongue, and Sylvia took advantage of the brief pause during which it was devoured, to penetrate into the lobby, where a melancholy citizen in a frock-coat and a straw hat was testing the point of a nib upon his thumb, whether with the intention of offering it to Mrs. Lebus to pick her teeth or of writing a letter was uncertain.

"Oh, Scipio!" said Mrs. Lebus. She pronounced it "Skipio."

"Wal?"

"She wants to see Mr. Madden."

"Sure."

The landlady turned to Sylvia.

"Mr. Lebus don't have no objections. Julie, take Miss—What did you say your name was?"

Sylvia saw no reason against falling into what Mrs. Lebus evidently considered was a skilfully laid trap, and told her.

"Scarlett," Mr. Lebus repeated. "We don't possess that name in Sulphurville. Yes, ma'am, that name's noo to Sulphurville."

"Sakes alive, Scipio, are you going to keep Miss Scarlett hanging around all day whiles you gossip about Sulphurville?" his wife asked. Aware of her husband's enthusiasm for his native place, she may have foreseen a dissertation upon its wonders unless she were ruthless.

"Julie'll take you up to his apartment. And don't you forget to knock before you open the door, Julie."

On the way up-stairs in the wake of the servant, Sylvia wondered how she should explain her intrusion to a stranger, even though he were an Englishman. She had so firmly decided to herself it was Arthur that she could not make any plans for meeting anybody else. Julie was quite ready to open the door of the bedroom and let Sylvia enter unannounced; she was surprised by being requested to go in first and ask the gentleman if he could receive Miss Scarlett. However, she yielded to foreign eccentricity, and a moment later ushered Sylvia in.

It was Arthur Madden; and Sylvia, from a mixture of penitence for the way she treated him at Colonial Terrace, of self-congratulation for being so sure beforehand that it was he, and from swift compassion for his illness and loneliness, ran across the room and greeted him with a kiss.

"How on earth did you get into this horrible hole?" Arthur asked.

"My dear, I knew it was you when I heard your name." Breathlessly she poured out the story of how she had found him.

"But you'd made up your mind to play the Good Samaritan to whoever it was—you never guessed for a moment at first that it was me."

She forgave him the faint petulance because he was ill, and also because it brought back to her with a new vividness long bygone jealousies, restoring a little more of herself as she once was, nearly thirteen years ago. How little he had changed outwardly, and much of what change there was might be put down to his illness.

"Arthur, do you remember Maria?" she asked.

He smiled. "He died only about two years ago. He lived with my mother after I went on the stage."

Sylvia wondered to him why they had never met all these years. She had known so many people on the stage, but then, of course, she had been a good deal out of England. What had made Arthur go on the stage first? He had never talked of it in the old days.

"I used always to be keen on music."

Sylvia whistled the melody that introduced them to each other, and he smiled again.

"My mother still plays that sometimes, and I've often thought of you when she does. She lives at Dulwich now."

They talked for a while of Hampstead and laughed over the escape.

"You were a most extraordinary kid," he told her. "Because, after all, I was seventeen at the time—older than

you. Good Lord! I'm thirty now, and you must be twenty-eight!"

To Sylvia it was much more incredible that he should be thirty; he seemed so much younger than she, lying here in this frowsy room, or was it that she felt so much older than he?

"But how on earth *did* you get stranded in this place?" she asked.

"I was touring with a concert party. The last few years I've practically given up the stage proper. I don't know why, really, for I was doing quite decently, but concert-work was more amusing, somehow. One wasn't so much at the beck and call of managers."

Sylvia knew, by the careful way in which he was giving his reasons for abandoning the stage, that he had not yet produced the real reason. It might have been baffled ambition or it might have been a woman.

"Well, we came to Sulphurville," said Arthur. He hesitated for a moment. Obviously there had been a woman. "We came to Sulphurville," he went on, "and played at the hotel you're playing at now—a rotten hole," he added, with retrospective bitterness. "I don't know how it was, but I suppose I got keen on the gambling—anyway, I had a row with the other people in the show, and when they left I refused to go with them. I stayed behind and got keen on the gambling."

"It was after the row that you took to roulette?" Sylvia asked.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I had a row with a girl. She treated me rather badly, and I stayed on. I lost a good deal of money. Well, it wasn't a very large sum, as a matter of fact, but it was all I had, and then I fell ill. I caught cold and I was worried over things. I cabled to my mother for some money, but there's been no reply. I'm afraid she's had difficulty in raising it. She quarreled with my father's people when I went on the stage. Damned narrow-minded set of yokels. Furious because I wouldn't take up farming. How I hate narrow-minded people!" And with an invalid's fretful intolerance he went on grumbling at the ineradicable characteristics of an English family four thousand miles away.

"Of course something may have happened to my mother," he added. "You may be sure that if anything had those beasts would never take the trouble to write and tell me. It would be a pleasure to them if they could annoy me in any way."

A swift criticism of Arthur's attitude toward the possibility of his mother's death rose to Sylvia's mind, but she repressed it, pleading with herself to excuse him because he was ill and overstrained. She was positively determined to see henceforth nothing but good in people, and in her anxiety to confirm herself in this resolve she was ready not merely to exaggerate everything in Arthur's favor, but even to twist any failure on his side into actual merit. Thus when she hastened to put her own resources at his disposal, and found him quite ready to accept without protest her help, she choked back the comparison with Jack Airdale's attitude in similar circumstances, and was quite angry with herself, saying how much more naturally Arthur had received her good-will and how splendid it was to find such simplicity and sincerity.

"I'll nurse you till you're quite well, and then why shouldn't we take an engagement together somewhere?"

Arthur became enthusiastic over this suggestion.

"You've not heard me sing yet. My throat's still too weak, but you'll be surprised, Sylvia."

"I haven't got anything but a very deep voice," she told him. "But I can usually make an impression."

"Can you? Of course, where I've always been held back is by lack of money. I've never been able to afford to buy good songs."

Arthur began to sketch out for himself a most radiant future, and as he talked Sylvia thought again how incredible it was that he should be older than herself. Yet was not this youthful enthusiasm exactly what she required? It was just the capacity of Arthur's for thinking he had a future that was going to make life tremendously worth while for her, tremendously interesting—oh, it was impossible not to believe in the decrees of fate, when at the very moment of her greatest longing to be needed by somebody she had met Arthur again. She could be everything to him, tend him through his illness, provide him with money to rid himself of the charity of Mrs. Lebus and the druggist, help him in his career, and watch over his fidelity to his ambition. She remembered how, years ago at Hampstead, his mother had watched over him; she could recall every detail of the room and see Mrs. Madden interrupt one of her long sonatas to be sure Arthur was not sitting in a draught. And it had been she who had heedlessly lured him away from that tender mother. There was poetic justice in this opportunity of reparation now accorded to her. To be sure, it had been nothing but a childish escapade—reparation was too strong a word; but there was something so neat about this encounter years afterward in a place like Sulphurville. How pale he was, which, nevertheless, made him more romantic to look at; how thin and white his hands were! She took one of them in her own boy's hands, as so many people had called them, and clasped it with the affection that one gives to small helpless things, to children and kittens, an affection that is half gratitude because one feels good-will rising like a sweet fountain from the depth of one's being, the freshness of which playing upon the spirit is so dear, that no words are enough to bless the wand that made the stream gush forth.

"I shall come and see you all day," said Sylvia. "But I think I ought not to break my contract at the Plutonian."

"Oh, you'll come and live here," Arthur begged. "You've no idea how horrible it is. There was a cockroach in the soup last night, and of course there are bugs. For goodness' sake, Sylvia, don't give me hope and then dash it away from me. I tell you I've had a hell of a time in this cursed hole. Listen to the bed; it sounds as if it would collapse at any moment. And the bugs have got on my nerves to such a pitch that I spend the whole time looking at spots on the ceiling and fancying they've moved. It's so hot, too; everything's rotted with heat. You mustn't desert me. You must come and stay here with me."

"Why shouldn't you move up to the Plutonian?" Sylvia suggested. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get one of the doctors to come and look at you, and if he thinks it's possible you shall move up there at once. Poor boy, it really is too ghastly here."

Arthur was nearly weeping with self-pity.

"But, my dear girl, it's much worse than you think. You know those horrible birds' bath-tubs in which they bring your food at third-rate American hotels, loathsome saucers with squash and bits of grit in watery milk that they call cereals, and bony bits of chicken, well, imagine being fed like that when you're ill; imagine your bed covered with those infernal saucers. One of them always used to get left behind when Julie cleared away, and it always used to fall

with a crash on the floor, and I used to wonder if the mess would tempt the cockroaches into my room. And then Lebus used to come up and make noises in his throat and brag about Sulphurville, and I used to know by his wandering eye that he was looking for what he called the cuspidor, which I'd put out of sight. And Mrs. Lebus used to come up and suck her teeth at me until I felt inclined to strangle her."

"The sooner you're moved away the better," Sylvia said, decidedly.

"Oh yes, if you think it can be managed. But if not, Sylvia, for God's sake don't leave me alone."

"Are you really glad to see me?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, it was like heaven opening before one's eyes!"

"Tell me about the girl you were fond of," she said, abruptly.

"What do you want to talk about her for? There's nothing to tell you, really. She had red hair."

Sylvia was glad that Arthur spoke of her with so little interest; it certainly was definitely comforting to feel the utter dispossession of that red-haired girl.

"Look here," said Sylvia. "I'm going to let these people suppose that I'm your long-lost relative. I shall pay their bill and bring the doctor down to see you. Arthur, I'm glad I've found you. Do you remember the cab-horse? Oh, and do you remember the cats in the area and the jug of water that splashed you? You were so unhappy, almost as unhappy as you were when I found you here. Have you always been treated unkindly?"

"I have had a pretty hard time," Arthur said.

"Oh, but you mustn't be sorry for yourself," she laughed.

"No, seriously, Sylvia, I've always had a lot of people against me."

"Yes, but that's such fun. You simply must be amused by life when you're with me. I'm not hard-hearted a bit, really, but you mustn't be offended with me when I tell you that really there's something a tiny bit funny in your being stranded in the Auburn Hotel, Sulphurville."

"I'm glad you think so," said Arthur, in rather a hurt tone of voice.

"Don't be cross, you foolish creature."

"I'm not a bit cross. Only I *would* like you to understand that my illness isn't a joke. You don't suppose I should let you pay my bills and do all this for me unless it were really something serious."

Sylvia put her hand on his mouth. "I forgive you," she murmured, "because you really are ill. Oh, Arthur, *do* you remember Hube? What fun everything is!"

Sylvia left him and went down-stairs to arrange matters with Mrs. Lebus.

"It was a relation, after all," she told her. "The Maddens have been related to us for hundreds of years."

"My! My! Now ain't that real queer? Oh, Scipio!"

Mr. Lebus came into view cleaning his nails with the same pen, and was duly impressed with the coincidence.

"Darned if I don't tell Pastor Gollick after next Sunday meeting. He's got a kind of hankering after the ways of Providence. Gee! Why, it's a sermonizing cinch."

There was general satisfaction in the Auburn Hotel over the payment of Arthur's bill.

"Not that I wouldn't have trusted him for another month and more," Mrs. Lebus affirmed. "But it's a satisfaction to be able to turn round and say to the neighbors, 'What did I tell you?' Folks in Sulphurville was quite sure I'd never be paid back a cent. This'll learn them!"

Mr. Lebus, in whose throat the doubts of the neighbors had gathered to offend his faith, cleared them out forever in one sonorous rauque.

The druggist's account was settled, and though, when Sylvia first heard him, he had been doubtful if his medicine was doing the patient any good, he was now most anxious that he should continue with the prescription. That afternoon one of the doctors in residence at the Plutonian visited Arthur and at once advised his removal thither.

Arthur made rapid progress when he was once out of the hospitable squalor of the Auburn Hotel, and the story of Sylvia's discovery of her unfortunate cousin became a romantic episode for all the guests of the Plutonian, a never-failing aid to conversation between wives waiting for their husbands to emerge from their daily torture at the hands of the masseurs, who lived like imps in the sulphurous glooms of the bath below; maybe it even provided the victims themselves with a sufficiently absorbing topic to mitigate the penalties of their cure.

Arthur himself expanded wonderfully as the subject of so much discussion. It gave Sylvia the greatest pleasure to see the way in which his complexion was recovering its old ruddiness and his steps their former vigor; but she did not approve of the way in which the story kept pace with Arthur's expansion. She confided to him how very personally the news of the sick Englishman had affected her and how she had made up her mind from the beginning that it was a stranded actor, and afterward, when she heard in the drug-store the name Madden, that it actually was Arthur himself. He, however, was unable to stay content with such an incomplete telepathy; indulging human nature's preference for what is not true, both in his own capacity as a liar and in his listeners' avid and wanton credulity, he transferred a woman's intimate hopes into a quack's tale.

"Then you didn't see your cousin's spirit go up in the elevator when you were standing in the lobby? Now isn't that perfectly discouraging?" complained a lady with an astral reputation in Illinois.

"I'm afraid the story's been added to a good deal," Sylvia said. "I'm sorry to disappoint the faithful."

"She's shy about giving us her experiences," said another lady from Iowa. "I know I was just thrilled when I heard it. It seemed to me the most wonderful story I'd ever imagined. I guess you felt kind of queer when you saw him lying on a bed in your room."

"He was in his own room," Sylvia corrected, "and I didn't feel at all queer. It was he who felt queer."

"Isn't she secretive?" exclaimed the lady from Illinois. "Why, I was going to ask you to write it up in our society's magazine, *The Flash*. We don't print any stories that aren't established as true. Well, your experience has given me real courage, Miss Scarlett. Thank you."

The astral enthusiast clasped Sylvia's hand and gazed at her as earnestly as if she had noticed a smut on her nose.

"Yes, I'm sure we ought to be grateful," said the lady from Iowa. "My! Our footsteps are treading in the unseen every day of our lives! You certainly are privileged," she added, wrapping Sylvia in a damp mist of benign fatuity.

"I wish you wouldn't elaborate everything so," Sylvia begged of Arthur when she had escaped from the deification of the two psychical ladies. "It makes me feel so dreadfully old to see myself assuming a legendary shape before my own eyes. It's as painful as being stuffed alive—stuffed alive with nonsense," she added, with a laugh.

Arthur's expansion, however, was not merely grafted on Sylvia's presentiment of his discovery in Sulphurville; he blossomed upon his own stock, a little exotically, perhaps, like the clumps of fiery cannas in the grounds of the hotel, but with a quite conspicuous effectiveness. Like the cannas, he required protection from frost, for there was a very real sensitiveness beneath all that flamboyance, and it was the knowledge of this that kept Sylvia from criticizing him at all severely. Besides, even if he did bask a little too complacently in expressions of interest and sympathy, it was a very natural reaction from his wretched solitude at the Auburn Hotel, for which he could scarcely be held culpable, least of all by herself. Moreover, was not this so visible recovery the best tribute he could have paid to her care? If he appeared to strut—for, indeed, there was a hint of strutting in his demeanor—he only did so from a sense of well-being. Finally, if any further defense was necessary, he was an Englishman among a crowd of Americans; the conditions demanded a good deal of competitive self-assertion.

Meanwhile summer was gone; the trees glowed with every shade of crimson. Sylvia could not help feeling that there was something characteristic in the demonstrative richness of the American fall; though she was far from wishing to underrate its beauty, the display was oppressive. She sighed for the melancholy of the European autumn, a conventional emotion, no doubt, but so closely bound up with old associations that she could not wish to lose it. This cremation of summer, these leafy pyrotechnics, this holocaust of color, seemed a too barbaric celebration of the year's death. It was significant that autumn with its long-drawn-out suggestion of decline should here have failed to displace fall; for there was something essentially catastrophic in this ruthless bonfire of foliage. It was not surprising that the aboriginal inhabitants should have been redskins, nor that the gorgeousness of nature should have demanded from the humanity it overwhelmed a readjustment of decorative values which superficial observers were apt to mistake for gaudy ostentation. Sylvia could readily imagine that if she had been accustomed from childhood to these crimson woods, these beefy robins, and these saucer-eyed daisies, she might have found her own more familiar landscapes merely tame and pretty; but as it was she felt dazzled and ill at ease. It's a little more and how much it is, she told herself, pondering the tantalizing similarity that was really as profoundly different as an Amazonian forest from Kensington Gardens.

Arthur's first flamboyance was much toned down by all that natural splendor; in fact, it no longer existed, and Sylvia found a freshening charm in his company amid these crimson trees and unfamiliar birds, and in this staring white hotel with its sulphurous exhalations. His complete restoration to health, moreover, was a pleasure and a pride that nothing could mar, and she found herself planning his happiness and prosperity as if she had already transferred to him all she herself hoped from life.

At the end of September the long-expected remittance arrived from Mrs. Madden, and Sylvia gathered from the letter that the poor lady had been much puzzled to send the money.

"We must cable it back to her at once," Sylvia said.

"Oh, well, now it's come, is that wise?" Arthur objected. "She may have had some difficulty in getting it, but that's over now."

"No, no. It must be cabled back to her. I've got plenty of money to carry us on till we begin to work together."

"But I can't go on accepting charity like this," Arthur protested. "It's undignified, really. I've never done such a thing before."

"You accepted it from your mother."

"Oh, but my mother's different."

"Only because she's less able to afford it than I am," Sylvia pointed out. "Look, she's sent you fifty pounds. Think how jolly it would be for her suddenly to receive fifty pounds for herself."

Arthur warmed to the idea; he could not resist the picture of his mother's pleasure, nor the kind of inverted generosity with which it seemed to endow himself. He talked away about the arrival of the money in England till it almost seemed as if he were sending his mother the accumulation of hard-earned savings to buy herself a new piano; that was the final purpose to which, in Arthur's expanding fancy, the fifty pounds was to be put. Sylvia found his attitude rather boyish and charming, and they had an argument, on the way to cable the money back, whether it would be better for Mrs. Madden to buy a Bechstein or a Blüthner.

Sylvia's contract with the Plutonian expired with the first fortnight of October, and they decided to see what likelihood there was of work in New York before they thought of returning to Europe. They left Sulphurville with everybody's good wishes, because everybody owed to their romantic meeting an opportunity of telling a really good ghost story at first hand, with the liberty of individual elaboration.

New York was very welcome after Sulphurville. They passed the wooded heights of the Hudson at dusk in a glow of somber magnificence softened by the vapors of the river. It seemed to Sylvia that scarcely ever had she contemplated a landscape of such restrained splendor, and she thought of that young New-Yorker who had preferred not to travel more than fifty miles west of his native city, though the motive of his loyalty had most improbably been the beauty of the Hudson. She wondered if Arthur appreciated New York, but he responded to her enthusiasm with the superficial complaints of the Englishman, complaints that when tested resolved themselves into conventional formulas of disapproval.

"I suppose trite opinions are a comfortable possession," Sylvia said. "But a good player does not like a piano that is too easy. You complain of the morning papers' appearing shortly after midnight, but confess that in your heart you prefer reading *them* in bed to reading a London evening paper, limp from being carried about in the pocket and with whatever is important in it illegible."

"But the flaring head-lines," Arthur protested. "You surely don't like them?"

"Oh, but I do!" she avowed. "They're as much more amusing than the dreary column beneath as tinned tongue is nicer than the dry undulation for which you pay twice as much. Head-lines are the poetry of journalism, and, after all, what would the Parthenon be without its frieze?"

"Of course you'd argue black was white," Arthur said.

"Well, that's a better standpoint than accepting everything as gray."

"Most things are gray."

"Oh no, they're not! Some things are. Old men's beards and dirty linen and Tschaiakowsky's music and oysters and Wesleyans."

"There you go," he jeered.

"Where do I go?"

"Right off the point," said Arthur, triumphantly. "No woman can argue."

"Oh, but I'm not a woman," Sylvia contradicted. "I'm a mythical female monster, don't you know—one of those queer beasts with claws like hay-rakes and breasts like peg-tops and a tail like a fish."

"Do you mean a Sphinx?" Arthur asked, in his literal way. He was always rather hostile toward her extravagant fancies, because he thought it dangerous to encourage a woman in much the same way as he would have objected to encouraging a beggar.

"No, I really meant a grinx, which is rather like a Sphinx, but the father was a griffin—the mother in both cases was a minx, of course."

"What was the father of the Sphinx?" he asked, rather ungraciously.

Sylvia clapped her hands.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to resist the question. A sphere—a woman's sphere, of course, which is nearly as objectionable a beast as a lady's man."

"You do talk rot sometimes," said Arthur.

"Don't you ever have fancies?" she demanded, mockingly.

"Yes, of course, but practical fancies."

"Practical fancies," Sylvia echoed. "Oh, my dear, it sounds like a fairy in Jaeger combinations! You don't know what fun it is talking rot to you, Arthur. It's like hoaxing a chicken with marbles. You walk away from my conversation with just the same disgusted dignity."

"You haven't changed a bit," Arthur proclaimed. "You're just the same as you were at fifteen."

Sylvia, who had been teasing him with a breath of malice, was penitent at once; after all, he had once run away with her, and it would be difficult for any woman of twenty-eight not to rejoice a little at the implication of thirteen undestructive years.

"That last remark was like a cocoanut thrown by a monkey from the top of the cocoanut-palm," she said. "You meant it to be crushing, but it was crushed instead, and quite deliciously sweet inside."

All the time that Sylvia had been talking so lightly, while the train was getting nearer and nearer to New York, there had lain at the back of her mind the insistent problem of her relationship to Arthur. The impossibility of their going on together as friends and nothing more had been firmly fixed upon her consciousness for a long time now, and the reason of this was to be sought for less in Arthur than in herself. So far they had preserved all the outward semblances of friendship, but she knew that one look from her eyes deep into his would transform him into her lover. She gave Arthur credit for telling himself quite sincerely that it would be "caddish" to make love to her while he remained under what he would consider a grave obligation; and because with his temperament it would be as much in the ordinary routine of the day to make love to a woman as to dress himself in the morning. She praised his decorum and was really half grateful to him for managing to keep his balance on the very small pedestal that she had provided. She might fairly presume, too, that if she let Arthur fall in love with her he would wish to marry her. Why should she not marry him? It was impossible to answer without accusing herself of a cynicism that she was far from feeling, yet without which she could not explain even to herself her quite definite repulsion from the idea of marrying him. The future, really, now, the very immediate future, must be flung to chance; it was hopeless to arrogate to her forethought the determination of it; besides, here was New York already.

"We'd better go to my old hotel," Sylvia suggested. Was it the reflection of her own perplexity, or did she detect in Arthur's accents a note of relief, as if he too had been watching the Palisades of the Hudson and speculating upon the far horizon they concealed?

They dined at Rector's, and after dinner they walked down Broadway into Madison Square, where upon this mild October night the Metropolitan Tower, that best of all the Gargantuan baby's toys, seemed to challenge the indifferent moon. They wandered up Madison Avenue, which was dark after the winking sky-signs of Broadway and with its not very tall houses held a thought of London in the darkness. But when Sylvia turned to look back it was no longer London, for she could see the great, illuminated hands and numerals of the clock in the Metropolitan flashing from white to red for the hour. This clock without a dial-plate was the quietest of the Gargantuan baby's toys, for it did not strike; one was conscious of the almost pathetic protest against all those other damnably noisy toys: one felt he might become so enamoured of its pretty silence that to provide himself with a new diversion he might take to doubling the hours to keep pace with the rapidity of the life with which he played.

"It's almost as if we were walking up Haverstock Hill again," said Arthur.

"And we're grown up now," Sylvia murmured. "Oh, dreadfully grown up, really!"

They walked on for a while in silence. It was impossible to keep back the temptation to cheat time by leaping over the gulf of years and being what they were when last they walked along together like this. Sylvia kept looking over her shoulder at the bland clock hanging in the sky behind them; at this distance the fabric of the tower had melted into the night and was no longer visible, which gave to the clock a strange significance and made it a simulacrum of time itself.

"You haven't changed a bit," she said.

"Do you remember when you told me I looked like a cow? It was after"—he breathed perceptibly faster—"after I kissed you."

She would not ascribe his remembering what she had called him to an imperfectly healed scar of vanity, but with kindlier thoughts turned it to a memento of his affection for her. After all, she had loved him then; it had been a girl's love, but did there ever come with age a better love than that first flushed gathering of youth's opening

flowers?

"Sylvia, I've thought about you ever since. When you drove me away from Colonial Terrace I felt like killing myself. Surely we haven't met again for nothing."

"Is it nothing unless I love you?" she asked, fiercely, striving to turn the words into weapons to pierce the recesses of his thoughts and blunt themselves against a true heart.

"Ah no, I won't say that," he cried. "Besides, I haven't the right to talk about love. You've been—Sylvia, I can't tell you what you've been to me since I met you again."

"If I could only believe—oh, but believe with all of me that was and is and ever will be—that I could have been so much."

"You have, you have."

"Don't take my love as a light thing," she warned him. "It's not that I'm wanting so very much for myself, but I want to be so much to you."

"Sylvia, won't you marry me? I couldn't ever take your love lightly. Indeed. Really."

"Ah, it's not asking me to marry you that means you're serious. I'm not asking you what your intentions are. I'm asking if you want me."

"Sylvia, I want you dreadfully."

"Now, now?" she pressed.

"Now and always."

They had stopped without being aware of it. A trolley-car jangled by, casting transitory lights that wavered across Arthur's face, and Sylvia could see how his eyes were shining. She dreaded lest by adding a few conventional words he should spoil what he had said so well, but he waited for her, as in the old days he had always waited.

"You're not cultivating this love, like a convalescent patient does for his nurse?" Sylvia demanded.

She stopped herself abruptly, conscious that every question she put to him was ultimately being put to herself.

"Did I ever not love you?" he asked. "It was you that grew tired of me. It was you that sent me away."

"Don't pretend that all these years you've been waiting for me to come back," she scoffed.

"Of course not. What I'm trying to explain is that we can start now where we left off; that is, if you will."

He held out his hand half timidly.

"And if I won't?"

The hand dropped again to his side, and there was so much wounded sensitiveness in the slight gesture that Sylvia caught him to her as if he were a child who had fallen and needed comforting.

"When I first put my head on your shoulder," she murmured. "Oh, how well I can remember the day—such a sparkling day, with London spread out like life at our feet. Now we're in the middle of New York, but it seems just as far away from us two as London was that day—and life," she added, with a sigh.

## CHAPTER XIV

CIRCUMSTANCES seemed to applaud almost immediately the step that Sylvia had taken. There was no long delay caused by looking for work in New York, which might have destroyed romance by its interposition of fretful hopes and disappointments. A variety company was going to leave in November for a tour in eastern Canada. At least two months would be spent in the French provinces, and Sylvia's bilingual accomplishment was exactly what the manager wanted.

"I'm getting on," she laughed. "I began by singing French songs with an English accent; I advanced from that to acting English words with a French accent; now I'm going to be employed in doing both. But what does it matter? The great thing is that we should be together."

That was where Arthur made the difference to her life; he was securing her against the loneliness that at twenty-eight was beginning once more to haunt her imagination. What did art matter? It had never been anything but a refuge.

Arthur himself was engaged to sing, and though he had not such a good voice as Claude Raglan, he sang with much better taste and was really musical. Sylvia was annoyed to find herself making comparisons between Claude and Arthur. It happened at the moment that Arthur was fussing about his number on the program, and she could not help being reminded of Claude's attitude toward his own artistic importance. She consoled herself by thinking that it should always be one of her aims to prevent the likeness growing any closer; then she laughed at herself for this resolve, which savored of developing Arthur, that process she had always so much condemned.

They opened at Toronto, and after playing a week Arthur caught a chill and was out of the program for a fortnight; this gave Sylvia a fresh opportunity of looking after him; and Toronto in wet, raw weather was so dreary that, to come back to the invalid after the performance, notwithstanding the ineffable discomfort of the hotel, was to come back home. During this time Sylvia gave Arthur a history of the years that had gone by since they parted, and it puzzled her that he should be so jealous of the past. She wondered why she could not feel the same jealousy about his past, and she found herself trying to regret that red-haired girl and many others on account of the obvious pleasure such regrets afforded Arthur. She used to wonder, too, why she always left out certain incidents and obscured certain aspects of her own past, whether, for instance, she did not tell him about Michael Fane on her own account or because she was afraid that Arthur would perceive a superficial resemblance between himself and Claude and a very real one between herself and Lily, or because she would have resented from Arthur the least expression, not so much of contempt as even of mild surprise, at Michael's behavior. Another subject she could never discuss with Arthur was her mother's love for her father, notwithstanding that his own mother's elopement with a groom must have prevented the least criticism on his side. Here again she wondered if her reserve was due to loyalty or to a vague sense of temperamental repetition that was condemning her to stand in the same relation to Arthur as her mother to her father. She positively had to run away from the idea that Arthur had his prototype; she was shutting him up in a box and scarcely even looking at him, which was as good as losing him altogether, really. Even when she

did look at him she handled him with such exaggerated carefulness, for fear of his getting broken, that all the pleasure of possession was lost. Perhaps she should have had an equal anxiety to preserve intact anybody else with whom she might have thrown in her lot; but when she thought over this attitude it was dismaying enough and seemed to imply an incapacity on her part to enjoy fully anything in life.

"I've grown out of being destructive; at least I think I have. I wonder if the normal process from Jacobinism to the intense conservatism of age is due to wisdom, jealousy, or fear.

"Arthur, what are your politics?" she asked, aloud.

He looked up from the game of patience he was playing, a game in which he was apt to attribute the pettiest personal motives to the court-cards whenever he failed to get out.

"Politics?" he echoed, vaguely. "I don't think I ever had any. I suppose I'm a Conservative. Oh yes, certainly I'm a Conservative. That infernal knave of hearts is covered now!" he added, in an aggrieved voice.

"Well, I didn't cover it," said Sylvia.

"No, dear, of course you didn't. But it really is a most extraordinary thing that I always get done by the knaves."

"You share your misfortune with the rest of humanity, if that's any consolation."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Orlone. He was a huge Neapolitan with the countenance of a gigantic and swarthy Punch, who had been trying to get back to Naples for twenty years, but had been prevented at first by his passion for gambling and afterward by an unwilling wife and a numerous family. Orlone made even Toronto cheerful, and before he had come two paces into a room Sylvia always began to laugh. He never said anything deliberately funny except on the stage, but laughter emanated from him infectiously, as yawning might. Though he had spent twenty years in America, he still spoke the most imperfect English; and when he and Sylvia had done laughing at each other they used to laugh all over again, she at his English, he at her Italian. When they had finished laughing at that Orlone used to swear marvelously for Sylvia's benefit whenever she should again visit Sirene; and she would teach him equally tremendous oaths in case he should ever come to London. When they had finished laughing at this, Orlone would look over Arthur's shoulder and, after making the most ridiculous gestures of caution, would finally burst out into an absolute roar of laughter right in Arthur's ear.

"*Pazienza*," Sylvia would say, pointing to the outspread cards.

"*Brava signora! Come parla bene!*"

And of course this was obviously so absurd a statement that it would set them off laughing again.

"You are a pair of lunatics," Arthur would protest; he would have liked to be annoyed at his game's being interrupted, but he was powerless to repulse Orlone's good humor.

When they returned to New York in the spring and Sylvia looked back at the tour, she divined how much of her pleasure in it had been owed to Orlone's all-pervading mirth. He had really provided the robust and full-blooded contrast to Arthur that had been necessary. It was not exactly that without him their existence together would have been insipid—oh no, there was nothing insipid about Arthur, but one appreciated his delicacy after that rude and massive personality. When they had traveled over leagues of snow-covered country, Orlone had always lightened the journey with gay Neapolitan songs, and sometimes with tender ones like "*Torno di Surriento*." It was then that, gazing out over the white waste, she had been able to take Arthur's hand and sigh to be sitting with him on some Sirenian cliff, to smell again the rosemary and crumble with her fingers the sunburnt earth. But this capacity of Orlone's for conjuring up the long Parthenopean shore was nothing more than might have been achieved by any terra-cotta Silenus in a provincial museum. After Silenus, what nymph would not turn to Hylas somewhat gratefully? It had been the greatest fun in the world to drive in tinkling sledges through Montreal, with Orlone to tease the driver until he was as sore as the head of the bear that in his fur coat he resembled; it had been fun to laugh with Orlone in Quebec and Ottawa and everywhere else; but after so much laughter it had always been particularly delightful to be alone again with Arthur, and to feel that he too was particularly enjoying being alone with her.

"I really do think we get on well together," she said to him.

"Of course we do."

And was there in the way he agreed with her just the least suggestion that he should have been surprised if she had not enjoyed his company, an almost imperceptible hint of complacency, or was it condescension?

"I really must get out of this habit of poking my nose into other people's motives," Sylvia told herself. "I'm like a horrid little boy with a new penknife. Arthur could fairly say to me that I forced myself upon him. I did really. I went steaming into the Auburn Hotel like a salvage-tug. There's the infernal side of obligations—I can't really quite free myself from the notion that Arthur ought to be grateful to me. He's in a false position through no fault of his own, and he's behaving beautifully. It's my own cheap cynicism that's to blame. I wish I could discover some mental bitter aloes that would cure me of biting my mind, as I cured myself of biting my nails."

Sylvia was very glad that Arthur succeeded in getting an engagement that spring to act, and that she did not; she was really anxious to let him feel that she should be dependent on him for a while. The result would have been entirely satisfactory but for one flaw—the increase in Arthur's sense of his own artistic importance. Sylvia would not have minded this so much if he had possessed enough of it to make him oblivious of the world's opinion, but it was always more of a vanity than a pride, chiefly concerned with the personal impression he made. It gave him much more real pleasure to be recognized by two shop-girls on their afternoon out than to be praised by a leading critic. Sylvia would have liked him to be equally contemptuous of either form of flattery, but that he should revel in both, and actually esteem more valuable the recognition accorded him by a shop-girl's backward glance and a nudge from her companion seemed to be lamentable.

"I don't see why you should despise me for being pleased," Arthur said. "I'm only pleased because it's a proof that I'm getting known."

"But they'd pay the same compliment to a man with a wen on his nose."

"No doubt, but also to any famous man," Arthur added.

Sylvia could have screamed with irritation at his lack of any sense of proportion. Why could he not be like Jack Airdale, who had never suffered from any illusion that what he was doing, so far as art was concerned, was not essentially insignificant? Yet, after all, was she not being unreasonable in paying so much attention to a childish piece of vanity that was inseparable from the true histrionic temperament?

"I'm sorry, Arthur. I think I'm being unfair to you. I only criticize you because I want you to be always the best of you. I see your point of view, but I was irritated by the giggles."

"I wasn't paying the least attention to the girls."

"Oh, I wasn't jealous," she said, quickly. "Oh no, darling Arthur, even with the great affection that I have for you, I shall never be able to be jealous of your making eyes at shop-girls."

When Arthur's engagement seemed likely to come to an end in the summer, they discussed plans and decided to take a holiday in the country, somewhere in Maine or Vermont. Arthur, as usual, set the scene beforehand, but as he set it quite in accord with Sylvia's taste she did not mind. Indeed, their holiday in Vermont on the borders of Lake Champlain was as near as she ever got to being perfectly happy with Arthur—happy, that is, to the point of feeling like a chill the prospect of separation. Sylvia was inclined to say that all Arthur's faults were due to the theater, and that when one had him like this in simple surroundings the best side of him was uppermost and visible, like a spun coin that shows a simple head when it falls.

Sylvia found that she had brought with her by chance the manuscript of the poems given to her by the outcast Englishman in Paris, and Arthur was very anxious that she should come back to her idea of rendering these. He had already composed a certain number of unimportant songs in his career, but now the Muses smiled upon him (or perhaps it might be truer to speak of her own smiles, Sylvia thought) with such favor that he set a dozen poems to the very accompaniment they wanted, the kind of music, moreover, that suited Sylvia's voice.

"We must get these done in New York," he said; but that week a letter came from Olive Airdale, and Sylvia had a sudden longing for England. She did not think she would make an effort to do anything in America. The truth was that she had supplemented the Englishman's poems with an idea of her own to give impressions gathered from her own life. It was strange how abruptly the longing to express herself had arrived, but it had arrived, with a force and fierceness that were undeniable. It had come, too, with that authentic fever of secrecy that she divined a woman must feel in the first moment of knowing that she has conceived. She could not have imparted her sense of creation to any one else; such an intimacy of revelation was too shocking to be contemplated. Somehow she was sure that this strange shamefulness was right and that she was entitled to hug within herself the conception that would soon enough be turned to the travail of birth.

"By, Jove! Sylvia, this holiday *has* done you good!" Arthur exclaimed.

She kissed him because, ignorant though he was of the true reason, she owed him thanks for her looks.

"Sylvia, if we go back to England, do let's be married first."

"Why?"

"Why, because it's not fair on me."

"On you?"

"Yes, on me. People will always blame me, of course."

"What has it got to do with anybody else except me?"

"My mother—"

"My dear Arthur," Sylvia interrupted, sharply, "if your mother ran away with a groom, she'll be the first person to sympathize with my point of view."

"I suppose you're trying to be cruel," said Arthur.

"And succeeding, to judge by your dolorous mouth. No, my dear, let the suggestion of marriage come from me. I sha'n't be hurt if you refuse."

"Well, are we to pretend we're married?" Arthur asked, hopelessly.

"Certainly not, if by that you mean that I'm to put 'Mrs. Arthur Madden' on a visiting-card. Don't look so frightened. I'm not proposing to march into drawing-rooms with a big drum to proclaim my emancipation from the social decencies. Don't worry me, Arthur. It's all much too complicated to explain, but I'll tell you one thing, I'm not going to marry you merely to remove the world's censure of your conduct, and as long as you feel about marrying me as you might feel about letting me carry a heavy bag, I'll never marry you."

"I don't feel a bit like that about it," he protested. "If I could leave you, I'd leave you now. But the very thought of losing you makes my heart stop beating. It's like suddenly coming to the edge of a precipice. I know perfectly well that you despise me at heart. You think I'm a wretched actor with no feelings off the stage. You think I don't know my own mind, if you even admit that I've got a mind at all. But I'm thirty-one. I'm not a boy. I've had a good many women in love with me. Now don't begin to laugh. I'm determined to say what I ought to have said long ago, and should have said if I hadn't been afraid the whole time of losing you. If I lose you now it can't be helped. I'd sooner lose you than go on being treated like a child. What I want to say is that, though I know you think it wasn't worth while being loved by the women who've loved me, I do think it was. I'm not in the least ashamed of them. Most of them, at any rate, were beautiful, though I admit that all of them put together wouldn't have made up for missing you. You're a thousand times cleverer than I. You've got much more personality. You've every right to consider you've thrown yourself away on me. But the fact remains that you've done it. We've been together now a year. That proves that there *is* something in me. I'm prouder of this year with you than of all the rest of my life. You've developed me in the most extraordinary way."

"I have?" Sylvia burst in.

"Of course you have. But I'm not going to be treated like a mantis."

"Like a what?"

"A mantis. You can read about it in that French book on insects. The female eats the male. Well, I'm damned well not going to be eaten. I'm not going back to England with you unless you marry me."

"Well, I'm not going to marry you," Sylvia declared.

"Very well, then I shall try to get an engagement on tour and we'll separate."

"So much the better," she said. "I've got a good deal to occupy myself at present."

"Of course you can have the music I wrote for those poems," said Arthur.

"Damn your music," she replied.

Sylvia was so much obsessed with the conviction of having at last found a medium for expressing herself in art



that, though she was vaguely aware of having a higher regard for Arthur at this moment than she had ever had, she could only behold him as a troublesome visitor that was preventing her from sitting down to work.

Arthur went off on tour. Sylvia took an apartment in New York far away up-town and settled down to test her inspiration. In six months she lived her whole life over again, and of every personality that had touched her own and left its mark she made a separate presentation. Her great anxiety was to give to each sketch the air of an improvisation, and in the course of it to make her people reveal their permanent characters rather than their transient emotions. It was really based on the art of the impersonator who comes on with a cocked hat, sticks out his neck, puts his hands behind his back, and his legs apart, leans over to the audience, and whispers Napoleon. Sylvia thought she could extend the pleasures of recognition beyond the mere mimicry of externals to a finer mimicry of essentials. She wanted an audience to clap not because she could bark sufficiently like a real dog to avoid being mistaken for a kangaroo, but because she could be sufficiently Mrs. Gainsborough not to be recognized as Mrs. Beardmore—yet without relying upon their respective sizes in corsets to mark the difference. She did not intend to use even make-up; the entertainment was always to be an improvisation. It was also to be undramatic; that is to say, it was not to obtain its effect by working to a climax, so that, however well hidden the mechanism might have been during the course of the presentation, the machinery would reveal itself at the end. Sylvia wanted to make each member of the audience feel that he had dreamed her improvisation, or rather she hoped that he would gain from it that elusive sensation of having lived it before, and that the effect upon each person listening to her should be ultimately incommunicable, like a dream. She was sure now that she could achieve this effect with the poems, not, as she had originally supposed, through their objective truthfulness, but through their subjective truth. That outcast Englishman should be one of her improvisations, and of course the original idea of letting the poems be accompanied by music would be ruinous; one might as well illustrate them with a magic lantern. As to her own inventions, she must avoid giving them a set form, because, whatever actors might urge to the contrary, a play could never really be performed twice by the same caste. She would have a scene painted like those futurist Italian pictures; they were trying to do with color what she was trying to do with acting; they were striving to escape from the representation of mere externals, and often succeeding almost too well, she added, with a smile. She would get hold of Ronald Walker in London, who doubtless by now would be too prosperous to serve her purpose himself, but who would probably know of some newly fledged painter anxious to flap his wings.

At the end of six months Sylvia had evolved enough improvisations to make a start. She went to bed tired out with the last night's work, and woke up in the morning with a sense of blankness at the realization of there being nothing to do that day. All the time she had been working she had been content to be alone; she had even looked forward to amusing herself in New York when her work was finished. Now the happy moment had come and she could feel nothing but this empty boredom. She wondered what Arthur was doing, and she reproached herself for the way in which she had discarded him. She had been so thrilled by the notion that she was necessary to somebody; it had seemed to her the consummation of so many heedless years. Yet no sooner had she successfully imposed herself upon Arthur than she was eager to think of nothing but herself without caring a bit about his point of view. Now that she could do nothing more with her work until the test of public performance was applied to it, she was bored; in fact, she missed Arthur. The truth was that half the pleasure of being necessary to somebody else had been that he should be necessary to her. But marriage with Arthur? Marriage with a curly-headed actor? Marriage with anybody? No, that must wait, at any rate until she had given the fruit of these six months to the world. She could not be hampered by belonging to anybody before that.

"I do think I'm justified in taking myself a little seriously for a while," said Sylvia, "and in shutting my eyes to my own absurdity. Self-mockery is dangerous beyond a certain point. I really will give this idea of mine a fair chance. If I'm a failure, Arthur will love me all the more through vanity, and if I'm a success—I suppose really he'll be vain of that, too."

Sylvia telegraphed to Arthur, and heard that he expected to be back in New York at the end of the month. He was in Buffalo this week. Nothing could keep her a moment longer in New York alone, and she went up to join him. She had a sudden fear when she arrived that she might find him occupied with a girl; in fact, really, when she came to think of the manner in which she had left him, it was most improbable that she should not. She nearly turned round and went back to New York; but her real anxiety to see Arthur and talk to him about her work made her decide to take the risk of what might be the deepest humiliation of her life. It was strange how much she wanted to talk about what she had done; the desire to do so now was as overmastering an emotion as had been in the first moment of conception the urgency of silence.

Sylvia was spared the shock of finding Arthur wrapped up in some one else.

"Sylvia, how wonderful! What a relief to see you again!" he exclaimed. "I've been longing for you to see me in the part I'm playing now. It's certainly the most successful thing I've done. I'm so glad you kept me from wasting myself any longer on that concert work. I really believe I've made a big hit at last."

Sylvia was almost as much taken aback to find Arthur radiant with the prospect of success as she would have been to find him head over ears in love. She derived very little satisfaction from the way in which he attributed his success to her; she was not at all in the mood for being a godmother, now that she had a baby of her own.

"I'm so glad, old son. That's splendid. Now I want to talk about the work I've been doing all these six months."

Forthwith she plunged into the details of the scheme, to which Arthur listened attentively enough, though he only became really enthusiastic when she could introduce analogies with his own successful performance.

"You will go in front to-night?" he begged. "I'm awfully keen to hear what you think of my show. Half my pleasure in the hit has been spoiled by your not having seen it. Besides, I think you'll be interested in noticing that once or twice I try to get the same effect as you're trying for in these impersonations."

"Damn your eyes, Arthur, they're not impersonations; they're improvisations."

"Did I say impersonations? I'm sorry," said Arthur, looking rather frightened.

"Yes, you'd better placate me," she threatened. "Or I'll spend my whole time looking at Niagara and never go near your show."

However, Sylvia did go to see the play that night and found that Arthur really was excellent in his part, which was that of the usual young man in musical comedy who wanders about in a well-cut flannel suit, followed by six young women with parasols ready to smother him with affection, melody, and lace. But how, even in the intoxication

of success, he had managed to establish a single analogy with what she proposed to do was beyond comprehension.

Arthur came out of the stage door, wreathed in questions.

"You were in such a hurry to get out," said Sylvia, "that you didn't take off your make-up properly. You'll get arrested if you walk about like that. I hear the sumptuary laws in Buffalo are very strict."

"No, don't rag. Did you like the hydrangea song? Do you remember the one I mean?"

He hummed the tune.

"I warn you, Arthur, there's recently been a moral up-lift in Buffalo. You will be sewn up in a barrel and flung into Niagara if you don't take care. No, seriously. I think your show was capital. Which brings me to the point. We sail for Europe at the end of April."

"Oh, but do you think it's wise for me to leave America now that I've really got my foot in?"

"Do you still want to marry me?"

"More than ever," he assured her.

"Very well, then. Your only chance of marrying me is to leave New York without a murmur. I've thought it all out. As soon as I get back I shall spend my last shilling on fitting out my show. When I've produced it and when I've found out that I've not been making a fool of myself for the last six months, perhaps I'll marry you. Until then—as friends we met, as anything more than friends we part. Got me, Steve?"

"But, Sylvia—"

"But me no buts, or you'll get my goat. Understand my meaning, Mr. Stevenson?"

"Yes, only—"

"The discussion's closed."

"Are we engaged?"

"I don't know. We'll have to see our agents about that."

"Oh, don't rag. Marriage is not a joke. You are a most extraordinary girl."

"Thanks for the discount. I shall be thirty in three months, don't forget. Talking of the advantages of rouge, you might get rid of some of yours before supper, if you don't mind."

"Are we engaged?" Arthur repeated, firmly.

"No, the engagement ring and the marriage-bells will be pealed simultaneously. You're as free as Boccaccio, old son."

"You're in one of those moods when it's impossible to argue with you."

"So much the better. We shall enjoy our supper all the more. I'm so excited at the idea of going back to England. After all, I shall have been away nearly three years. I shall find godchildren who can talk. Think of that. Arthur, don't you want to go back?"

"Yes, if I can get a shop. I think it's madness for me to leave New York, but I daren't let you go alone."

The anticipation of being in England again and of putting to the test her achievement could not charm away all Sylvia's regret at leaving America, most of all New York. She owed to New York this new stability that she discovered in her life. She owed to some action of New York upon herself the delight of inspiration, the sweet purgatory of effort, the hope of a successful end to her dreams. It was the only city of which she had ever taken a formal farewell, such as she took from the top of the Metropolitan Tower upon a lucid morning in April. The city lay beneath, with no magic of smoke to lend a meretricious romance to its checkered severity; a city encircled with silver waters and pavilioned by huge skies, expressing modern humanity, as the great monuments of ancient architecture express the mighty dead.

"We too can create our Parthenons," thought Sylvia, as she sank to earth in the florid elevator.

They crossed the Atlantic on one of the smaller Cunard liners. The voyage was uneventful. Nearly all the passengers in turn told Sylvia why they were not traveling by one of the large ships, but nobody suggested as a reason that the smaller ships were cheaper.

When they reached England Arthur went to stay with his mother at Dulwich. Sylvia went to the Airdales; she wanted to set her scheme in motion, but she promised to come and stay at Dulwich later on.

"At last you've come back," Olive said, on the verge of tears. "I've missed you dreadfully."

"Great Scott! Look at Sylvius and Rose!" Sylvia exclaimed. "They're like two pigs made of pink sugar. Pity we never thought of it at the time, or they could have been christened Scarlet and Crimson."

"Darlings, isn't godmamma horrid to you?" said Olive.

"Here! Here! What are you teaching them to call me?"

"Dat's godmamma," said Sylvius, in a thick voice.

"Dat's godmamma," Rose echoed.

"Not on your life, cullies," their godmother announced, "unless you want a thick ear each."

"Give me one," said Sylvius, stolidly.

"Give me one," Rose echoed.

"How can you tease the poor darlings so?" Olive exclaimed.

"Sylvius will have one," he announced, in the same thick monotone.

"Rose will have one," echoed his sister.

Sylvia handed her godson a large painted ball.

"Here's your thick ear, Pork."

Sylvius laughed fatly; the ball and the new name both pleased him.

"And here's yours," she said, offering another to Rose, who waited to see what her brother did with his and then proceeded to do the same with the same fat laugh. Suddenly, however, her lips puckered.

"What is it, darling?" her mother asked, anxiously.

"Rose wants to be said Pork."

"You didn't call her Pork," Olive translated, reproachfully, to Sylvia.

"Give me back the ball," said Sylvia. "Now then, here's your thick ear, Porca."

Rose laughed ecstatically. After two ornaments had been broken Jack came in, and the children retired with their nurse.

Sylvia found that family life had not spoiled Jack's interest in that career of hers; indeed, he was so much excited by her news that he suggested omitting for once the ceremony of seeing the twins being given their bath in order not to lose any of the short time available before he should have to go down to the theater. Sylvia, however, would not hear of any change in the domestic order, and reminded Jack that she was proposing to quarter herself on them for some time.

"I know, it's terrific," he said.

The excitement of the bath was always considerable, but this evening, with Sylvia's assistance, it became acute. Sylvius hit his nurse in the eye with the soap, and Rose, wrought up to a fever of emulation, managed to hurl the sponge into the grate.

Jack was enthusiastic about Sylvia's scheme. She was not quite sure that he understood exactly at what she was aiming, but he wished her so well that in any case his criticism would have had slight value; he gave instead his devoted attention, and that seemed a pledge of success. Success! Success! it sounded like a cataract in her ears, drowning every other sound. She wondered if the passion of her life was to be success. On no thoughts urged so irresistibly had she ever sailed to sleep, nor had she ever wakened in such a buoyancy, greeting the day as a swimmer greets the sea.

"Now what about the backing?" Jack asked.

"Backing? I'll back myself. You'll be my manager. I've enough to hire the Pierian Hall for a day and a night. I've enough to pay for one scene. Which reminds me I must get hold of Ronald Walker. You'll sing, Jack, two songs? Oh, and there's Arthur Madden. He'll sing, too."

"Who's he?" Olive asked.

"Oh, didn't I tell you about him?" said Sylvia, almost too nonchalantly, she feared. "He's rather good. Quite good, really. I'll tell you about him sometime. By the way, I've talked so much about myself and my plans that I've never asked about other people. How's the countess?"

Olive looked grave. "We don't ever see them, but everybody says that Clarehaven is going the pace tremendously."

"Have they retreated to Devonshire?"

"Oh no! Didn't you hear? I thought I'd told you in one of my letters. He had to sell the family place. Do you remember a man called Leopold Hausberg?"

"Do I not?" Sylvia exclaimed. "He took a flat once for a chimpanzee instead of Lily."

"Well, he's become Lionel Houston this year, and he's talked about with Dorothy a good deal. Of course he's very rich, but I do hope there's nothing in what people say. Poor Dorothy!"

"She'll survive even the divorce court," Sylvia said. "I wish I knew what had become of Lily. She might have danced in my show. I suppose it's too late now, though. Poor Lily! I say, we're getting very compassionate, you and I, Olive. Are you and Jack going to have any more kids?"

"Sylvia darling," Olive exclaimed, with a blush.

Sylvia had intended to stay a week or two with the Airdales, and, after having set in motion the preliminaries of her undertaking, to go down to Dulwich and visit Mrs. Madden, but she thought she would get hold of Ronnie Walker first, and with this object went to the Café Royal, where she should be certain of finding either him or a friend who would know where he was.

Sylvia had scarcely time to look round her in the swirl of gilt and smoke and chatter before Ronald Walker himself, wearing now a long pale beard, greeted her.

"My dear Ronald, what's the matter? Are you tired of women? You look more like a grate than a great man," Sylvia exclaimed. "Cut it off and give it to your landlady to stuff her fireplace this summer."

"What shall we drink?" he asked, imperturbably.

"I've been absinthe for so long that really—"

"It's a vermouth point," added Ronald.

"Ronnie, you devil, I can't go on, it's too whisky. Well, of course after that we ought both to drink port and brandy. Don't you find it difficult to clean your beard?"

"I'm not a messy feeder," said Ronnie.

"You don't paint with it, then?"

"Only Cubist pictures."

Sylvia launched out into an account of her work, and demanded his help for the painting of the scene.

"I want the back-cloth to be a city, not to represent a city, mark you, but to be a city."

She told him about New York as beheld from the Metropolitan Tower, and exacted from the chosen painter the ability to make the audience think that.

"I'm too old-fashioned for you, my dear," said Ronald.

"Oh, you, my dear man, of course. If I asked you for a city, you'd give me a view from a Pierrot's window of a Harlequin who'd stolen the first five numbers of the Yellow Book from a Pantaloon who kept a second-hand bookshop in a street-scene by Steinlen, and whose daughter, Columbine, having died of grief at being deserted by the New English Art Club, had been turned into a book-plate. No, I want some fierce young genius of to-day."

Over their drinks they discussed possible candidates; finally Ronald said he would invite a certain number of the most representative and least representational modern painters to his studio, from whom Sylvia might make her choice. Accordingly, two or three days later Sylvia visited Ronald in Grosvenor Road. For the moment, when she entered, she thought that he had been playing a practical joke upon her, for it seemed impossible that these extraordinary people could be real. The northerly light of the studio, severe and virginal, was less kind than the

feverish exhalation of the Café Royal.

"They are real?" she whispered to her host.

"Oh yes, they're quite real, and in deadly earnest. Each of them represents a school and each of them thinks I've been converted to his point of view. I'll introduce Morphew."

He beckoned to a tall young man in black, who looked like a rolled-up umbrella with a jade handle.

"Morphew, this is Miss Scarlett. She's nearly as advanced as you are. Sylvia, this is Morphew, the Azurist."

Walker maliciously withdrew when he had made the introduction.

"Ought I to know what an Azurist is?" Sylvia asked. She felt that it was an unhappy opening for the conversation, but she did not want to hurt his religious feelings if Azurism was a religion, and if it was a trade she might be excused for not knowing what it was, such a rare trade must it be.

Mr. Morphew smiled in a superior way. "I think most people have heard about me by now."

"Ah, but I've been abroad."

"Several of my affirmations have been translated and published in France, Germany, Russia, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Hungary, and Holland," said Mr. Morphew, in a tone that seemed to imply that if Sylvia had not grasped who he was by now she never would, in which case it was scarcely worth his while to go on talking to her.

"Oh dear! What a pity!" she exclaimed. "I was in Montenegro all last year, so I must have missed them. I don't *think* you're known in Montenegro yet. It's such a small country, I should have been sure to hear about anything like that.

"Like what?" thought Sylvia, turning up her mind's eyes to heaven.

Mr. Morphew was evidently not sure what sort of language was spoken in Montenegro, and thought it wiser to instruct Sylvia than to expose his own ignorance.

"What color is that?" he suddenly demanded, pointing to the orange coverlet of a settee.

"Orange," said Sylvia. "Perhaps it's inclining to some shade of brown."

"Orange! Brown!" Mr. Morphew scoffed. "It's blue."

"Oh, but it's not!" she contradicted. "There's nothing blue about it."

"Blue," repeated Mr. Morphew. "All is blue. The Azurists deny that there is anything but blue. Blue," he continued in a rapt voice. "Blue! I was a Blanchist at first; but when we quarreled most of the Blanchists followed me. I shall publish the nineteenth affirmation of the Azurists next week. If you give me your address I'll send you a copy. We're going to give the Ovists hell in a new magazine that we're bringing out. We find that affirmations are not enough."

"Will it be an ordinary magazine?" Sylvia asked. "Will you have stories, for instance?"

"We don't admit that stories exist. Life-rays exist. There will be life-rays in our magazine."

"I suppose they'll be pretty blue," said Sylvia.

"All life-rays are blue."

"I suppose you don't mind wet weather?" she suggested. "Because it must be rather difficult to know when it's going to clear up."

"There are degrees of blue," Mr. Morphew explained.

"I see. Life isn't just one vast, reckless blue. Well, thank you very much for being so patient with my old-fashioned optical ideas. I do hope you'll go to America and tell them that their leaves turn blue in autumn. Anyway, you'll feel quite at home crossing the ocean, though some people won't even admit that's blue."

Sylvia left the Azurist and rejoined Ronald.

"Well," he laughed. "You look quite frightened."

"My dear, I've just done a bolt from the blue. You are a beast to rag my enthusiasms. Isn't there anybody here whose serious view of himself I can indorse?"

"Well, there's Pattison, the Ovist. He maintains that everything resolves itself into ovals."

"I think I should almost prefer Azurism," said Sylvia. "What about the Blanchists?"

"Oh, you wouldn't like them! They maintain that there's no such thing as color; their pictures depend on the angle at which they're hung."

"But if there's no such thing as color, how can they paint?"

"They don't. Their canvases are blank. Then there are the Combinationists. They don't repudiate color, but they repudiate paint. The most famous Combinationist picture exhibited so far consisted of half a match-box, a piece of orange-peel, and some sealing-wax, all stuck upon a slip of sugar-paper. The other Combinationists wanted to commit suicide because they despaired of surpassing it. Roger Cadbury wrote a superb introduction, pointing out that it must be either liked or disliked, but that it was impossible to do both or neither. It was that picture which inspired Hezekiah Penny to write what is considered one of his finest poems. You know it, perhaps?

"Why do I sing?

There is no reason why I should continue:

This image of the essential bin is better

Than the irritated uvulas of modern poets.

That caused almost as great sensation as the picture, because some of his fellow-poets maintained that he had no right to speak for anybody but himself."

"Who is Hezekiah Penny?" Sylvia asked.

"Hezekiah Penny is a provincial poet who began by writing Provençal verse."

"But this is madness," Sylvia exclaimed, looking round her at the studio, where the representatives of modernity eyed one another with surprise and distaste like unusual fish in the tank of an aquarium. "Behind all this rubbish surely something truly progressive exists. You've deliberately invited all the charlatans and impostors to meet me. I tell you, Ronnie, I saw lots of pictures in New York that were eccentric, but they were striving to rediscover life in

painting. You're prejudiced because you belong to the decade before all this, and you've taken a delight in showing me all the extravagant side of it. You should emulate Tithonus."

"Who was he?"

"Now don't pretend you can't follow a simple allusion. The gentleman who fell in love with Aurora."

"Didn't he get rather tired of living forever?"

"Oh, well, that was because he grew a beard like you. Don't nail my allusions to the counter; they're not lies."

"I'll take pity on you," said Ronnie. "There is quite a clever youth whom I intended for you from the beginning. He's coming in later, when the rest have gone."

When she and Ronnie were alone again and before Lucian Hope, the young painter, arrived, Sylvia, looking through one of his sketch-books, came across a series of studies of a girl in the practice-dress of dancing; he told her it was Jenny Pearl.

"Maurice Avery's Jenny," she murmured. "What happened to her?"

"Didn't you hear about it? She was killed by her husband. It was a horrible business. Maurice went down to see her where she lived in the country, and this brute shot her. It was last summer. The papers were full of it."

"And what happened to Maurice?"

"Oh, he nearly went off his head. He's wandering about in Morocco probably."

"Where I met him," said Sylvia.

"But didn't he tell you?"

"Oh, it was before. More than three years ago. We talked about her."

Sylvia shuddered. One of her improvisations had been Maurice Avery; she must burn it.

Lucian Hope arrived before Sylvia could ask any more questions about the horrible event; she was glad to escape from the curiosity that would have turned it into a tale of the police-court. The new-comer was not more than twenty-two, perhaps less—too young, at any rate, to have escaped from the unconventionality of artistic attire that stifles all personality. But he had squirrel's eyes, and was not really like an undertaker. He was shy, too, so shy that Sylvia wondered how he could tolerate being stared at in the street on account of his odd appearance. She would have liked to ask him what pleasure he derived from such mimicry of a sterile and professional distinction, but she feared to hurt his young vanity; moreover, she was disarmed by those squirrel's eyes, so sharp and bright even in the falling dusk. The three of them talked restlessly for a while, and Sylvia, seeing that Ronald was preparing to broach the subject for which they were met, anticipated him with a call for attention, and began one of her improvisations. It was of Concetta lost in a greater city than Granada. By the silence that followed she knew that her companions had cared for it, and she changed to Mrs. Gainsborough. Then she finished up with three of the poems.

"Could you paint me a scene for that?" she asked, quickly, to avoid any comment.

"Oh, rather!" replied the young man, very eagerly; though it was nearly dark now, she could see his eyes flashing real assurance.

They all three dined together that evening, and Lucian Hope, ever since Sylvia had let him know that she stood beside him to conquer the world, lost his early shyness and talked volubly of what she wanted and what he wanted to do. Ronald Walker presided in the background of the ardent conversation, and as they came out of the restaurant he took Sylvia's arm for a moment.

"All right?"

"Quite all right, thanks."

"So's your show going to be. Not so entirely modern as you gave me to suppose. But that's not a great fault."

Sylvia and Lucian Hope spent a good deal of time together, so much was there to talk about in connection with the great enterprise. She brought him to the Airdales' that he might meet Jack, who was supposed to have charge of the financial arrangements. The sight of the long-haired young man made Sylvius cry, and, as a matter of course, Rose, also, which embarrassed Lucian Hope a good deal, especially when he had to listen to an explanation of himself by Olive for the children's consolation.

"He's a gollywog," Sylvius howled.

"He's a gollywog," Rose echoed.

"He's tum to gobble us," Sylvius bellowed.

"To gobble us, to gobble us," Rose wailed.

"He's not a gollywog, darlings," their mother declared. "He makes pretty pictures, oh, such pretty pictures of—"

"He *is* a gollywog," choked Sylvius, in an ecstasy of rage and fear.

"A gollywog, a gollywog," Rose insisted.

Their mother changed her tactics. "But he's a kind gollywog. Oh, such a kind gollywog, the kindest, nicest gollywog that was ever thought of."

"He *is*—ent," both children proclaimed. "He's bad!"

"Don't you think I'd better go?" asked the painter. "I think it must be my hair that's upsetting them."

He started toward the door, but, unfortunately, he was on the wrong side of the children, who, seeing him make a move in their direction, set up such an appalling yell that the poor young man drew back in despair. In the middle of this the maid entered, announcing Mr. Arthur Madden, who followed close upon her heels. Sylvius and Rose were by this time obsessed with the idea of an invasion by an army of gollywogs, and Arthur's pleasant face took on for them the dreaded lineaments of the foe. Both children clung shrieking to their mother's skirts. Sylvia and Jack were leaning back, incapable through laughter. Arthur and Lucian Hope surveyed miserably the scene they had created. At last the nurse arrived to rescue the twins, and they were carried away without being persuaded to change their minds about the inhuman nature of the two visitors.

Arthur apologized for worrying Sylvia, but his mother was so anxious to know when she was coming down to Dulwich, and as he had been up in town seeing about an engagement, he had not been able to resist coming to visit her.

Sylvia felt penitent for having abandoned Arthur so completely since they had arrived in England, and she told

him she would go back with him that very afternoon.

"Oh, but Miss Scarlett," protested Lucian, "don't you remember? We arranged to explore Limehouse tomorrow."

Arthur looked at the painter very much as if he were indeed the gollywog for which he had just been taken.

"I don't want to interfere with previous arrangements," he said, with such a pathetic haughtiness that Sylvia had not the heart to wound his dignity, and told Lucian Hope that the expedition to Limehouse must be postponed. The young painter looked disconsolate and Arthur blossomed from his fading. However, Lucian had the satisfaction of saying, in a mysterious voice, to Sylvia before he went:

"Well, then, while you're away I'll get on with it."

It was not until they were half-way to Dulwich in the train that Arthur asked Sylvia what he was going to get on with.

"My scene," she said.

"What scene?"

"Arthur, don't be stupid. The set for my show."

"You're not going to let a youth like that paint a set for you? You're mad. What experience has he had?"

"None. That's exactly why I chose him. I'm providing the experience."

"Have you known him long?" Arthur demanded. "You can't have known him very long. He must have been at school when you left England."

"Don't be jealous," said Sylvia.

"Jealous? Of him? Huh!"

Mrs. Madden had changed more than Sylvia expected. Arthur had seemed so little altered that she was surprised to see his mother with white hair, for she could scarcely be fifty-five yet. The drawing-room of the little house in Dulwich recalled vividly the drawing-room of the house in Hampstead; nor had Mrs. Madden bought herself a new piano with the fifty pounds that was cabled back to her from Sulphurville. It suddenly occurred to Sylvia that this was the first time she had seen her since she ran away with Arthur, fifteen years ago, and she felt that she ought to apologize for that behavior now; but, after all, Mrs. Madden had run away herself once upon a time with her father's groom and could scarcely have been greatly astonished at Arthur's elopement.

"You have forgiven me for carrying him off from Hampstead?" she asked, with a smile.

Mrs. Madden laughed gently. "Yes, I was frightened at the time. But in the end it did Arthur good, I think. It's been such a pleasure to me to hear how successful he's been lately." She looked at Sylvia with an expression of marked sympathy.

After supper Mrs. Madden came up to Sylvia's room and, taking her hand, said, in her soft voice, "Arthur has told me all about you two."

Sylvia flushed and pulled her hand away. "He's no business to tell you anything about me," she said, hotly.

"You mustn't be angry, Sylvia. He made it quite clear that you hadn't quite made up your mind yet. Poor boy," she added, with a sigh.

Sylvia, when she understood that Arthur had not said anything about their past, had a strong desire to tell Mrs. Madden that she had lived with him for a year. She resented the way she had said "poor boy." She checked the impulse and assured her that if Arthur had spoken of their marriage he had had no right to do so. It really was most improbable that she should marry him; oh, but most improbable.

"You always spoke very severely about love when you were a little girl. Do you remember? You must forgive a mother, but I must tell you that I believe Arthur's happiness depends upon your marrying him. He talks of nothing else and makes such plans for the future."

"He makes too many plans," Sylvia said, severely.

"Ah, there soon comes a time when one ceases to make plans," Mrs. Madden sighed. "One is reduced to expedients. But now that you're a woman, and I can easily believe that you're the clever woman Arthur says you are, for you gave every sign of it when you were young—now that you're a woman, I do hope you'll be a merciful woman. It's such a temptation—you must forgive my plain speaking—it's such a temptation to keep a man like Arthur hanging on. You must have noticed how young he is still—to all intents and purposes quite a boy; and believe me he has the same romantic adoration for you and your wonderfulness as he had when he was seventeen. Don't, I beg of you, treat such devotion too lightly."

Sylvia could not keep silent under this unjustified imputation of heartlessness, and broke out:

"I'm sure you'll admit that Arthur has given quite a wrong idea of me when I tell you that we lived together for a year; and you must remember that I've been married already and know what it means. Arthur has no right to complain of me."

"Oh, Sylvia, I'm sorry!" Mrs. Madden almost whispered. "Oh dear! how could Arthur do such a thing?"

"Because I made him, of course. Now you must forgive *me* if I say something that hurts your feelings, but I must say it. When you ran away with your husband, you must have made him do it. You *must* have done."

"Good gracious me!" Mrs. Madden exclaimed. "I suppose I did. I never looked at it in that light before. You've made me feel quite ashamed of my behavior. Quite embarrassed. And I suppose everybody has always blamed me entirely; but because my husband was one of my father's servants I always used to be defending him. I never thought of defending myself."

Sylvia was sorry for stirring up in Mrs. Madden's placid mind old storms. It was painful to see this faded gentlewoman in the little suburban bedroom, blushing nervously at the unlady-like behavior of long ago. Presently Mrs. Madden pulled herself up and said, with a certain decision:

"Yes, but I did marry him."

"Yes, but you hadn't been married already. You hadn't knocked round half the globe for twenty-eight years. It's no good my pretending to be shocked at myself. I don't care a bit what anybody thinks about me, and, anyway, it's done now."

"Surely you'd be happier if you married Arthur after—after that," Mrs. Madden suggested.

"But I'm not in the least unhappy. I can't say whether I shall marry Arthur until I've given my performance. I can't say what effect either success or failure will have on me. My whole mind is concentrated in the Pierian Hall next October."

"I'm afraid I can't understand this modern way of looking at things."

"But there's nothing modern about my point of view, Mrs. Madden. There's nothing modern about the egotism of an artist. Arthur is as free as I am. He has his own career to think about. He does think about it a great deal. He's radically much more interested in that than in marrying me. The main point is that he's free at present. From the moment I promise to marry him and he accepts that promise he won't be free. Nor shall I. It wouldn't be fair on either of us to make that promise now, because I must know what October is going to bring forth."

"Well, I call it very modern. When I was young we looked at marriage as the most important event in a girl's life."

"But you didn't, dear Mrs. Madden. You, or rather your contemporaries, regarded marriage as a path to freedom—social freedom, that is. Your case was exceptional. You fell passionately in love with a man beneath you, as the world counts it. You married him, and what was the result? You were cut off by your relations as utterly as if you had become the concubine of a Hottentot."

"Oh, Sylvia dear, what an uncomfortable comparison!"

"Marriage to your contemporaries was a social observance. I'm not religious, but I regard marriage as so sacred that, because I've been divorced and because, so far as I know, my husband is still alive, I have something like religious qualms about marrying again. It takes a cynic to be an idealist; the sentimentalist gets left at the first fence. It's just because I'm fond of Arthur in a perfectly normal way when I'm not immersed in my ambition that I even contemplate the *notion* of marrying him. I've got a perfectly normal wish to have children and a funny little house of my own. So far as I know at present, I should like Arthur to be the father of my children. But it's got to be an equal business. Personally I think that the Turks are wiser about women than we are; I think the majority of women are only fit for the harem and I'm not sure that the majority wouldn't be much happier under such conditions. The incurable vanity of man, however, has removed us from our seclusion to admire his antics, and it's too late to start shutting us up in a box now. Woman never thought of equality with man until he put the notion into her head."

"I think perhaps supper may be ready," Mrs. Madden said. "It all sounds very convincing as you speak, but I can't help feeling that you'd be happier if you wouldn't take everything to pieces to look at the works. Things hardly ever go so well again afterward. Oh dear, I wish you hadn't lived together first."

"It breaks the ice of the wedding-cake, doesn't it?" said Sylvia.

"And I wish you wouldn't make such bitter remarks. You don't really mean what you say. I'm sure supper must be ready."

"Oh, but I do," Sylvia insisted, as they passed out into the narrow little passage and down the narrow stairs into the little dining-room. Nevertheless, in Sylvia's mind there was a kindness toward this little house, almost a tenderness, and far away at the back of her imagination was the vision of herself established in just such another little house.

"But even the Albert Memorial would look all right from the wrong end of a telescope," she said to herself.

One thing was brought home very vividly during her stay in Dulwich, which was the difference between what she had deceived herself into thinking was that first maternal affection she had felt for Arthur and the true maternal love of his mother. Whenever she had helped Arthur in any way, she had always been aware of enjoying the sensation of her indispensableness; it had been an emotion altogether different from this natural selfishness of the mother; it was really one that had always reflected a kind of self-conscious credit upon herself. Here in Dulwich, with this aspect of her affection for Arthur completely overshadowed, Sylvia was able to ask herself more directly if she loved him in the immemorial way of love; and though she could not arrive at a finally positive conclusion, she was strengthened in her resolve not to let him go. Arthur himself was more in love with her than he had ever been, and she thought that perhaps this was due to that sudden and disquieting withdrawal of herself; in the midst of possession he had been dispossessed, and until he could pierce her secret reasons he would inevitably remain deeply in love, even to the point of being jealous of a boy like Lucian Hope. Sylvia understood Arthur's having refused an engagement to tour as juvenile lead in a successful musical piece and his unwillingness to leave her alone in town; he was rewarded, too, for his action, because shortly afterward he obtained a good engagement in London to take the place of a singer who had retired from the cast of the Frivolity Theater. At that rate he would soon find himself at the Vanity Theater itself.

In June Sylvia went back to the Airdales', and soon afterward took rooms near them in West Kensington. It was impossible to continue indefinitely to pretend that Arthur and herself were mere theatrical acquaintances, and one day Olive asked Sylvia if she intended to marry him.

"What do you advise?" Sylvia asked. "There's a triumph, dearest Olive. Have I ever asked your advice before?"

"I like him; Jack likes him, too, and says that he ought to get on fast now; but I don't know. Well, he's not the sort of man I expected you to marry."

"You've had an ideal for me all the time," Sylvia exclaimed. "And you've never told me."

"Oh no, I've never had anybody definite in my mind, but I think I should be able to say at once if the man you had chosen was the right one. Don't ask me to describe him, because I couldn't do it. You used to tease me about marrying a curly-headed actor, but Arthur Madden seems to me much more of a curly-headed actor than Jack is."

"In fact, you thoroughly disapprove of poor Arthur?" Sylvia pressed.

"Oh dear, no! Oh, not at all! Please don't think that. I'm only anxious that you shouldn't throw yourself away."

"Remnants always go cheap," said Sylvia. "However, don't worry. I'll be quite sure of myself before I marry anybody again."

The summer passed away quickly in a complexity of arrangements for the opening performance at the Pierian Hall. Sylvia stayed three or four times at Dulwich and grew very fond of Mrs. Madden, who never referred again to the subject of marriage. She also went up to Warwickshire with Olive and the children, much to the pleasure of Mr. Fanshawe, who was now writing a supplementary volume called *More Warwickshire Worthies*. In London she

scarcely met any old friends; indeed, she went out of her way to avoid people like the Clarehavens, because they would not have been interested in what she was doing. By this time Sylvia had reached the point of considering everybody either for the interest and belief he evinced in her success or by the use he could be to her in securing it. The first rapturous egoism of Arthur's own success in London had worn off with time, and he was able to devote himself entirely to running about for Sylvia, which gradually made her regard him more and more as a fixture. As for Lucian Hope, he thought of nothing but the great occasion, and would have fought anybody who had ventured to cast a breath of doubt upon the triumph at hand. The set that he had painted was exactly what Sylvia required, and though both Arthur and Jack thought it would distract the audience's attention by puzzling them, they neither of them on Sylvia's account criticized it at all harshly.

At last in mid-October the very morning of the day arrived, so long anticipated with every kind of discussion that its superficial resemblance to other mornings seemed heartless and unnatural. It was absurd that a milkman's note should be the same as yesterday, that servants should shake mats on front-door steps as usual, and that the maid who knocked at Sylvia's door should not break down beneath the weightiness of her summons. Nor, when Sylvia looked out of the window, were Jack and Arthur and Ronald and Lucian pacing with agitated steps the pavement below, an absence of enthusiasm, at any rate on the part of Arthur and Lucian, that hurt her feelings, until she thought for a moment how foolishly unreasonable she was being.

As soon as Sylvia was dressed she went round to the Airdales'; everybody she met on the way inspired her with a longing to confide in him the portentousness of the day, and she found herself speculating whether several business men, who were hurrying to catch the nine-o'clock train, had possibly an intention of visiting the Pierian Hall that afternoon. She was extremely annoyed to find, when she reached the Airdales' house, that neither Jack nor Olive was up.

"Do they know the time?" she demanded of the maid, in a scandalized voice. "Their clock must have stopped."

"Oh no, miss, I don't think so. Breakfast is at ten, as usual. There's Mr. Airdale's dressing-room bell going now, miss. That 'll be for his shaving-water. Shall I say you're waiting to see him?"

What a ridiculous time to begin shaving, Sylvia thought.

"Yes, please," she added, aloud. "Or no, don't bother him; I'll come back at ten o'clock."

Sylvia saw more of the streets of West Kensington in that hour than she had ever seen of them before, and decided that the neighborhood was impossible. Nothing so intolerably monotonous as these rows of stupid and meaningless houses had ever been designed. One after another of them blinked at her in the autumnal sunshine with a fatuous complacency that made her long to ring all the bells in the street. Presently she found herself by the play-fields of St. James's School, where the last boys were hurrying across the grass like belated ants. She looked at the golden clock in the school-buildings—half past nine. In five hours and a half she would be waiting for the curtain to go up; in seven hours and a half the audience would be wondering if it should have tea in Bond Street or cross Piccadilly and walk down St. James's Street to Rumpelmayer's. This problem of the audience began to worry Sylvia. She examined the alternatives with a really anxious gravity. If it went to Rumpelmayer's it would have to walk back to the Dover Street Tube, which would mean recrossing Piccadilly; on the other hand, it would be on the right side for the omnibuses. On the other hand, it would find Rumpelmayer's full, because other audiences would have arrived before it, invading the tea-shop from Pall Mall. Sylvia grew angry at the thought of these other audiences robbing her audience of its tea—her audience, some members of which would have read in the paper this morning:

#### PIERIAN HALL.

This afternoon at 3 p. m.

SYLVIA SCARLETT

IN

IMPROVISATIONS

and would actually have paid, some of them, as much as seven shillings and sixpence to see Sylvia Scarlett. Seven hours and a half: seven shillings and sixpence: 7½ plus 7½ made fifteen. When she was fifteen she had met Arthur. Sylvia's mind rambled among the omens of numbers, and left her audience still undecided between Bond Street and Rumpelmayer's, left it upon the steps of the Pierian Hall, the sport of passing traffic, hungry, thirsty, homesick. In seven and a half hours she would know the answer to that breathless question asked a year ago in Vermont. To think that the exact spot on which she had stood when she asked was existing at this moment in Vermont! In seven and a half hours, no, in seven hours and twenty-five minutes; the hands were moving on. It was really terrible how little people regarded the flight of time; the very world might come to an end in seven hours and twenty-five minutes.

"Have you seen Sylvia Scarlett yet?"

"No, we intended to go yesterday, but there were no seats left. They say she's wonderful."

"Oh, my dear, she's perfectly amazing! Of course it's something quite new. You really must go."

"Who is she like?"

"Oh, she's not like anybody else. I'm told she's half French."

"Oh, really! How interesting."

"Good morning! Have you used Pear's soap?"

"V-vi-vin-vino-vinol-vinoli-vinolia."

Sylvia pealed the Airdales' bell, and found Jack in the queer mixed costume which a person wears on the morning of an afternoon that will be celebrated by his best tail-coat.

"My dear girl, you really mustn't get so excited," he protested, when he saw Sylvia's manner.

"Oh, Jack, do you think I shall be a success?"

"Of course you will. Now, do, for goodness' sake, drink a cup of coffee or something."



Sylvia found that she was hungry enough to eat even an egg, which created a domestic crisis, because Sylvius and Rose quarreled over which of them was to have the top. Finally it was adjusted by awarding the top to Sylvius, but by allowing Rose to turn the empty egg upside down for the exquisite pleasure of watching Sylvia tap it with ostentatious greed, only to find that there was nothing inside, after all, an operation that Sylvius watched with critical jealousy and Rose saluted with ecstatic joy. Sylvia's disappointment was so beautifully violent that Sylvius regretted the material choice he had made, and wanted Sylvia to eat another egg, of which Rose might eat the top and he offer the empty shell; but it was too late, and Sylvius learned that often the shadow is better than the substance.

It had been decided in the end that Jack should confine himself to the cares of general management, and Arthur was left without a rival. Sylvia had insisted that he should only sing old English folk-songs, a decision which he had challenged at first on the ground that he required the advertisement of more modern songs, and that Sylvia's choice was not going to help him.

"You're not singing to help yourself," she had told him. "You're singing to help me."

In addition to Arthur there was a girl whom Lucian Hope had discovered, a delicate creature with red hair, whose chief claim to employment was that she was starving, though incidentally she had a very sweet and pure soprano voice. Finally there was an Irish pianist whose technique and good humor were alike unassailable.

Before the curtain went up, Sylvia could think of nothing but the improvisations that she ought to have invented instead of the ones that she had. It was a strain upon her common sense to prevent her from canceling the whole performance and returning its money to the audience. The more she contemplated what she was going to do the more she viewed the undertaking as a fraud upon the public. There had never been any *chicane* like the *chicane* she was presently going to commit. What was that noise? Who had given the signal to O'Hea? What in hell's name did he think he was doing at the piano? The sound of the music was like water running into one's bath while one was lying in bed—nothing could stop it from overflowing presently. Nothing could stop the curtain from rising. At what a pace he was playing that Debussy! He was showing off, the fool! A ridiculous joke came into her mind that she kept on repeating while the music flowed: "Many a minim makes a maxim. Many a minim makes a maxim." How cold it was in the dressing-room, and the music was getting quicker and quicker. There was a knock at the door. It was Arthur. How nice he looked with that red carnation in his buttonhole.

"How nice you look, Arthur, in that buttonhole."

The flower became tremendously important; it seemed to Sylvia that, if she could go on flattering the flower, O'Hea would somehow be kept at the piano.

"Well, don't pull it to pieces," said Arthur, ruthfully. But it was too late; the petals were scattered on the floor like drops of blood.

"Oh, I'm sorry! Come along back to my dressing-room. I'll give you another flower."

"No, no; there isn't time now. Wait till you come off after your first set."

Now it was seeming the most urgent thing in the world to find another flower for Arthur's buttonhole. At all cost the rise of that curtain must be delayed. But Arthur had brought her on the stage and the notes were racing toward the death of the piece. It was absurd of O'Hea to have chosen Debussy; the atmosphere required a ballade of Chopin, or, better still, Schumann's Noveletten. He could have played all the Noveletten. Oh dear, what a pity she had not thought of making that suggestion. The piano would have been scarcely half-way through by now.

Suddenly there was silence. Then there followed the languid applause of an afternoon audience for an unimportant part of the program.

"He's stopped," Sylvia exclaimed, in horror. "What *has* happened?"

She turned to Arthur in despair, but he had hurried off the stage. Lucian Hope's painted city seemed to press forward and stifle her; she moved down-stage to escape it. The curtain went up and she recoiled as from a chasm at her feet. Why on earth was O'Hea sitting in that idiotic attitude, as if he were going to listen to a sermon, looking down like that, with his right arm supporting his left elbow and his left hand propping up his chin? How hot the footlights were! She hoped nothing had happened, and looked round in alarm; but the fireman was standing quite calmly in the wings. Just as Sylvia was deciding that her voice could not possibly escape from her throat, which had closed upon it like a pair of pincers, the voice tore itself free and went traveling out toward that darkness in front, that nebulous darkness scattered with hands and faces and programs. Like Concetta in a great city, Sylvia was lost in that darkness; she *was* Concetta. It seemed to her that the applause at the end was not so much approval of Concetta as a welcome to Mrs. Gainsborough; when isolated laughs and volleys of laughter came out of the darkness and were followed sometimes by the darkness itself laughing everywhere, so that O'Hea looked up very personally and winked at her, then Sylvia fell in love with her audience. The laughter increased, and suddenly she recognized at the end of each volley that Sylvius and Rose were supplementing its echoes with rapturous echoes of their own. She could not see them, but their gurgles in the darkness were like a song of nightingales to Sylvia. She ceased to be Mrs. Gainsborough, and began to say three or four of the poems. Then the curtain fell, and came up again, and fell, and came up again, and fell, and came up again.

Jack was standing beside her and saying:

"Splendid, splendid, splendid, splendid!"

"Delighted, delighted, delighted, delighted!"

"Very good audience! Splendid audience! Delighted audience! Success! Success! Success!"

Really, how wonderfully O'Hea was playing, Sylvia thought, and how good that Debussy was!

The rest of the performance was as much of a success as the beginning. Perhaps the audience liked best Mrs. Gowndry and the woman who smuggled lace from Belgium into France. Sylvius and Rose laughed so much at the audience's laughter at Mrs. Gowndry that Sylvius announced in the ensuing lull that he wanted to go somewhere, a desire which was naturally indorsed by Rose. The audience was much amused, because it supposed that Sylvius's wish was a tribute to the profession of Mrs. Gowndry's husband, and whatever faint doubts existed about the propriety of alluding in the Pierian Hall to a lavatory-attendant were dispersed.

Sylvia forgot altogether about the audience's tea when the curtain fell finally. It was difficult to think about anything with so many smiling people pressing round her on the stage. Several old friends came and reminded her of

their existence, but there was no one who had quite such a radiant smile as Arthur Lonsdale.

"Lonnie! How nice of you to come!"

"I say, topping, I mean. What? I say, that's a most extraordinary back-cloth you've got. What on earth is it supposed to be? It reminds me of what you feel like when you're driving a car through a strange town after meeting a man you haven't seen for some time and who's just found out a good brand of fizz at the hotel where he's staying. I was afraid you'd get bitten in the back before you'd finished. I say, Mrs. Gowndry was devilish good. Some of the other lads and lasses were a bit beyond me."

"And how's business?"

"Oh, very good. We've just put the neatest little ninety h. p. torpedo-body two-seater on the market. I'll tootle you down to Brighton in it one Sunday morning. Upon my word, you'll scarcely have time to wrap yourself up before you'll have to unwrap yourself to shake hands with dear old Harry Burnly coming out to welcome you from the Britannia."

"Not married yet, Lonnie?"

"No, not yet. Braced myself up to do it the other day, dived in, and was seized with cramp at the deep end. She offered to be a sister to me and I sank like a stone. My mother's making rather a nuisance of herself about it. She keeps producing girls out of her muff like a conjurer, whenever she comes to see me. And what girls! Heather mixture most of them, like Guggenheim's Twelfth of August. I shall come to it at last, I suppose. Mr. Arthur Lonsdale and his bride leaving St. Margaret's, Westminster, under an arch of spanners formed by grateful chauffeurs whom the brilliant and handsome young bride-groom has recommended to many titled readers of this paper. Well, so long, Sylvia; there's a delirious crowd of admirers waiting for you. Send me a line where you're living and we'll have a little dinner somewhere—"

Sylvia's success was not quite so huge as in the first intoxication of her friends' enthusiasm she had begun to fancy. However, it was unmistakably a success, and she was able to give two recitals a week through the autumn, with certainly the prospect of a good music-hall engagement for the following spring, if she cared to accept it. Most of the critics discovered that she was not as good as Yvette Guilbert. In view of Yvette Guilbert's genius, of which they were much more firmly convinced now than they would have been when Yvette Guilbert first appeared, this struck them as a fairly safe comparison; moreover, it gave their readers an impression that they understood French, which enhanced the literary value of their criticism. To strengthen this belief most of them were inclined to think that the French poems were the best part of Miss Sylvia Scarlett's performance. One or two of the latter definitely recalled some of Yvette Guilbert's early work, no doubt by the number of words they had not understood, because somebody had crackled a program or had shuffled his feet or had coughed. As for the English character studies, or, as some of them carried away by reminiscences of Yvette Guilbert into oblivion of their own language preferred to call them, *études*, they had a certain distinction, and in many cases betrayed signs of an almost meticulous observation, though at the same time, like everybody else doing anything at the present moment except in France, they did not have as much distinction or meticulousness as the work of forerunners in England or contemporaries abroad. Still, that was not to say that the work of Miss Sylvia Scarlett was not highly promising and of the greatest possible interest. The *timbre* of her voice was specially worthy of notice and justified the italics in which it was printed. Finally, two critics, who were probably sitting next to each other, found a misprint in the program, no doubt in searching for a translation of the poems.

If Sylvia fancied a lack of appreciation in the critics, all her friends were positive that they were wonderful notices for a beginner.

"Why, I think that's a splendid notice in the *Telegraph*," said Olive. "I found it almost at once. Why, one often has to read right through the paper before one can find the notice."

"Do you mean to tell me that the most self-inebriated egotist on earth ever read right through the *Daily Telegraph*? I don't believe it. He'd have been drowned like Narcissus."

Arthur pressed for a decision about their marriage, now that Sylvia knew what she had so long wanted to know; but she was wrapped up in ideas for improving her performance and forbade Arthur to mention the subject until she raised it herself; for the present she was on with a new love twice a week. Indeed, they were fascinating to Sylvia, these audiences each with a definite personality of its own. She remembered how she had scoffed in old days at the slavish flattery of them by her fellow-actors and actresses; equally in the old days she had scoffed at love. She wished that she could feel toward Arthur as she felt now toward her audiences, which were as absorbing as children with their little clevernesses and precocities. The difference between what she was doing now and what she had done formerly when she sang French songs with an English accent was the difference between the realism of an old knotted towel that is a baby and an expensive doll that may be a baby but never ceases to be a doll. Formerly she had been a mechanical thing and had never given herself because she had possessed neither art nor truth, but merely craft and accuracy. She had thought that the personality was degraded by depending on the favor of an audience. All that old self-consciousness and false shame were gone. She and her audience communed through art as spirits may commune after death. In the absorption of studying the audience as a separate entity, Sylvia forgot that it was made up of men and women. When she knew that any friends of hers were in front, they always remained entirely separate in her mind from the audience. Gradually, however, as the autumn advanced, several people from long ago re-entered her life and she began to lose that feeling of seclusion from the world and to realize the gradual setting up of barriers to her complete liberty of action. The first of these visitants was Miss Ashley, who in her peacock-blue gown looked much as she had looked when Sylvia last saw her.

"I could not resist coming round to tell you how greatly I enjoyed your performance," she said. "I've been so sorry that you never came to see me all these years."

Sylvia felt embarrassed, because she dreaded presently an allusion to her marriage with Philip, but Miss Ashley was too wise.

"How's Hornton House!" asked Sylvia, rather timidly. It was like inquiring after the near relation of an old friend who might have died.

"Just the same. Miss Primer is still with me. Miss Hossack now has a school of her own. Miss Pinck became very ill with gouty rheumatism and had to retire. I won't ask you about yourself; you told me so much from the stage. Now that we've been able to meet again, won't you come and visit your old school sometime?"

Sylvia hesitated.

"Please," Miss Ashley insisted. "I'm not inviting you out of politeness. It would really give me pleasure. I have never ceased to think about you all these years. Well, I won't keep you, for I'm sure you must be tired. Do come. Tell me, Sylvia. I should so like to bring the girls one afternoon. What would be a good afternoon to come?"

"You mean, when will there be nothing in the program that—"

"We poor schoolmistresses," said Miss Ashley, with a whimsical look of deprecation.

"Come on Saturday fortnight, and afterward I'll go back with you all to Hornton House. I'd love that."

So it was arranged.

On Wednesday of the following week it happened that there was a particularly appreciative audience, and Sylvia became so much enamoured of the laughter that she excelled herself. It was an afternoon of perfect accord, and she traced the source of it to a group somewhere in the middle of the stalls, too far back for her to recognize its composition. After the performance a pack of visiting-cards was brought to the door of her dressing-room. She read: "Mrs. Ian Campbell, Mrs. Ralph Dennison." Who on earth were they? "Mr. Leonard Worsley"—

Sylvia flung open the door, and there they all were, Mr. and Mrs. Worsley, Gladys and Enid, two good-looking men in the background, two children in the foreground.

"Gladys! Enid!"

"Sylvia!"

"Oh, Sylvia, you were priceless! Oh, we enjoyed ourselves no end! You don't know my husband. Ian, come and bow nicely to the pretty lady," cried Gladys.

"Sylvia, it was simply ripping. We laughed and laughed. Ralph, come and be introduced, and this is Stumpy, my boy," Enid cried, simultaneously.

"Fancy, he's a grandfather," the daughters exclaimed, dragging Mr. Worsley forward. He looked younger than ever.

"Hercules is at Oxford, or of course he'd have come, too. This is Proodles," said Gladys, pointing to the little girl.

"Sylvia, why did you desert us like that?" Mrs. Worsley reproachfully asked. "When are you coming down to stay with us at Arbor End? Of course the children are married...." She broke off with half a sigh.

"Oh, but we can all squash in," Gladys shouted.

"Oh, rather," Enid agreed. "The kids can sleep in the coal-scuttles. We sha'n't notice any difference."

"Dears, it's so wonderful to see you," Sylvia gasped. "But do tell me who you all are over again. I'm so muddled."

"I'm Mrs. Ian Campbell," Gladys explained. "And this is Ian. And this is Proodles, and at home there's Groggles, who's too small for anything except pantomimes. And that's Mrs. Ralph Dennison, and that's Ralph, and that's Stumpy, and at home Enid's got a girlie called Barbara. Mother hates being a grandmother four times over, so she's called Aunt Victoria, and of course father's still one of the children. We've both been married seven years."

Nothing had so much brought home to Sylvia the flight of time as this meeting with Gladys and Enid, who when she last saw them were only sixteen. It was incredible. And they had not forgotten her; in what seemed now a century they had not forgotten her! Sylvia told them about Miss Ashley's visit and suggested that they should come and join the party of girls from Hornton House. It would be fun, would it not? Miss Primer was still at the school.

Gladys and Enid were delighted with the plan, and on the day fixed about twenty girls invaded Sylvia's dressing-room, shepherded by Miss Primer, who was still melting with tears for Rodrigo's death in the scene. Miss Ashley had brought the carriage to drive Sylvia back, but she insisted upon going in a motor-bus with the others and was well rewarded by Miss Primer's ecstasies of apprehension. Sylvia wandered with Gladys and Enid down well-remembered corridors, in and out of bedrooms and class-rooms; she listened to resolutions to send Prudence and Barbara to Hornton House in a few years. For Sylvia it was almost too poignant, the thought of these families growing up all round her, while she, after so many years, was still really as much alone as she had always been. The company of all these girls with their slim black legs, their pigtailed and fluffy hair tied back with big bows, the absurdly exaggerated speech and the enlaced loves of girlhood—the accumulation of it all was scarcely to be borne.

When Sylvia visited Arbor End and talked once again to Mrs. Worsley, sitting at the foot of her bed, about the wonderful lives of that so closely self-contained family, the desolation of the future came visibly nearer; it seemed imperative at whatever cost to drive it back.

Shortly before Christmas a card was brought round to Sylvia—"Mrs. Prescott-Merivale, Hardingham Hall, Hunts."

"Who is it?" she asked her maid.

"It's a lady, miss."

"Well of course I didn't suppose a cassowary had sent up his card. What's she like?"

The maid strove to think of some phrase that would describe the visitor, but she fell back hopelessly upon her original statement.

"She's a lady, miss." Then, with a sudden radiancy lighting her eyes, she added, "And there's a little boy with her."

"My entertainment seems to be turning into a children's treat," Sylvia muttered to herself. "*Sic itur ad astra.*"

"I beg your pardon, miss, did you say to show her in?"

Sylvia nodded.

Presently a tall young woman in the late twenties, with large and brilliant gray eyes, rose-flushed and deep in furs, came in, accompanied by an extraordinarily handsome boy of seven or eight.

"How awfully good of you to let me waste a few minutes of your time," she said, and as she spoke, Sylvia had a fleeting illusion that it was herself who was speaking, a sensation infinitely rapid, but yet sufficiently clear to make her ask herself the meaning of it, and to find in the stranger's hair the exact replica of her own. The swift illusion and the equally swift comparison were fled before she had finished inviting her visitor to sit down.

"I must explain who I am. I've heard about you, oh, of course, publicly, but also from my brother."

"Your brother?" repeated Sylvia.

"Yes, Michael Fane."

"He's not with you?"

"No. I wish he had been. Alas! he's gone off to look for a friend who, by the way, I expect you know also. Maurice Avery? All sorts of horrid rumors about what had happened to him in Morocco were being brought back to us, so Michael went off last spring, and has been with him ever since."

"But I thought he was a monk," Sylvia said.

Mrs. Merivale laughed with what seemed rather like relief. "No, he's neither priest nor monk, thank goodness, though the prospect still hangs over us."

"After all these years?" Sylvia asked, in astonishment.

"Oh, my dear Miss Scarlett, don't forget the narrow way is also long. But I didn't come to talk to you about Michael. I simply most shamelessly availed myself of his having met you a long time ago to give myself an excuse for talking to you about your performance. Of course it's absolutely great. How lucky you are!"

"Lucky?" Sylvia could not help glancing at the handsome boy beside her.

"He's rather a lamb, isn't he?" Mrs. Merivale agreed. "But you started all sorts of old, forgotten, hidden-away, burned-out fancies of mine this afternoon, and—you see, I intended to be a professional pianist once, but I got married instead. Much better, really, because, unless—Oh, I don't know. Yes, I *am* jealous of you. You've picked me up and put me down again where I was once. Now the conversation's backed into me, and I really do want to talk about you. Your performance is the kind about which one wonders why nobody ever did it before. That's the greatest compliment one can pay an artist, I think. All great art is the great expression of a great commonplace; that's why it always looks so easy. I do hope you're having the practical success you deserve."

"Yes, I think I shall be all right," Sylvia said. "Only, I expect that after the New-Year I shall have to cut my show considerably and take a music-hall engagement. I'm not making a fortune at the Pierian."

"How horrid for you! How I should love to play with you! Oh dear! It's heartrending to say it, but it's much too late. Well, I mustn't keep you. You've given me such tremendous pleasure and just as much pain with it as makes the pleasure all the sharper.... I'll write and tell Michael about you."

"I expect he's forgotten my name by now," Sylvia said.

"Oh no, he never forgets anybody, even in the throes of theological speculation. Good-by. I see that this is your last performance for the present. I shall come and hear you again when you reopen. How odious about music-halls. You ought to have called yourself Silvia Scarletti, told your press agent that you were the direct descendant of the composer, vowed that when you came to England six months ago you could speak nothing but Polish, and you could have filled the Pierian night and day for a year. We're queer people, we English. I think, you know, it's a kind of shyness, the way we treat native artists. You get the same thing in families. It's not really that the prophet has no honor, etc.; it really is, I believe, a fear of boasting, which would be such bad form, wouldn't it? Of course we've ruined ourselves as a nation by our good manners and our sense of humor. Why, we've even insisted that what native artists we do support shall be gentlemen first and artists second. In what other country could an actor be knighted for his trousers or an author for his wife's dowry? Good-by. I do wish you great, great success."

"Anyway, I can't be knighted," Sylvia laughed.

"Oh, don't be too sure. A nation that has managed to turn its artists into gentlemen will soon insist on turning its women into gentlemen, too, or at any rate on securing their good manners in some way."

"Women will never really have good manners," Sylvia said.

"No, thank God. There you're right. Well, good-by. It's been so jolly to talk to you, and again I've loved every moment of this afternoon. Charles," she added to the handsome boy, "after bragging about your country's good manners, let's see you make a decent bow."

He inclined his head with a grave courtesy, opened the door for his mother, and followed her out.

The visit of Michael's sister, notwithstanding that she had envied Sylvia's luck, left her with very little opinion of it herself. What was her success, after all? A temporary elation dependent upon good health and the public taste, financially uncertain, emotionally wearing, radically unsatisfying and insecure, for, however good her performance was, it was always mummery, really, as near as mummery could get to creative work, perhaps, but mortal like its maker.

"Sad to think this is the last performance here," said her maid.

Sylvia agreed with her. It was a relief to find a peg on which to hang the unreasonable depression that was weighing her down. She passed out of her dressing-room. As the stage door swung to behind her a figure stepped into the lamplight of the narrow court; it was Jimmy Monkley. The spruceness had left him; all the color, too, had gone from his face, which was now sickly white—an evil face with its sandy mustache streaked with gray and its lusterless green eyes. Sylvia was afraid that from the way she started back from him he would think that she scorned him for having been in prison, and with an effort she tried to be cordial.

"You've done damned well for yourself," he said, paying no attention to what she was saying. She found this meeting overwhelmingly repulsive and moved toward her taxi. It was seeming to her that Monkley had the power to snatch her away and plunge her back into that life of theirs. She would really rather have met Philip than him.

"Damned well for yourself," he repeated.

"I'm sorry I can't stay. I'm in a hurry. I'm in a hurry."

She reached the taxi and slammed the door in his face.

This unexpected meeting convinced Sylvia of the necessity of attaching herself finally to a life that would make the resurrection of a Monkley nothing more influential than a nightmare. She knew that she was giving way to purely nervous fears in being thus affected by what, had she stopped to think, was the natural result of her name's becoming known. But the liability to nervous fears was in itself an argument that something was wrong. When had she ever been a prey to such hysteria before? When had she allowed herself to be haunted by a face, as now she was being haunted by Monkley's face? Suppose he had seated himself behind the taxi and that when she reached the Airdales' house he should once more be standing on the pavement in the lamplight?

In Brompton Road Sylvia told the driver to stop. She wanted to do some Christmas shopping. After an hour or more spent among toys she came out with a porter loaded with packages, and looked round her quickly; but of course he was not upon the pavement. How absurd she had been! In any case, what could Monkley do? She would forget all about him. To-morrow was Christmas Eve. There was going to be such a jolly party at the Airdales'. The taxi hummed toward West Kensington. Sylvia leaned back, huddled up with her thoughts, until they reached Lillie Road. She had passed Mrs. Meares's house so many times without giving it a second look. Now she found herself peering out into the thickening fog in case Monkley should be standing upon the door-step. She was glad when she reached the Airdales' house, warm and bright, festooned with holly and mistletoe. There were pleasant little household noises everywhere, comfortable little noises, and a rosy glow from the silken shades of the lamps; the carpet was so quiet and the parlor-maid in a clean cap and apron so efficient, so quick to get in all the parcels and shut out the foggy night.

Olive was already in the drawing-room, and because this was to be a specially unceremonious evening in preparation for the party to-morrow, Olive was in a pink tea-gown that blended with the prettiness of her cozy house and made her more essentially a part of it all. How bleak was her own background in comparison with this, Sylvia thought. Jack was dining out most unwillingly and had left a great many pleas to be forgiven by Sylvia on the first night of her Christmas visit. After dinner they sat in the drawing-room, and Sylvia told Olive about her meeting with Monkley. She said nothing about Michael Fane's sister; that meeting did not seem to have any bearing upon the subject she wanted to discuss.

"Can you understand," Sylvia asked, "being almost frightened into marriage?"

"Yes, I think so," Olive replied, as judiciously as the comfort of her surroundings would allow. It was impossible to preserve a critical attitude in this room; in such a suave and genial atmosphere one accepted anything.

"Well, do you still object to my marrying Arthur?" Sylvia demanded.

"But, my dear, I never objected to your marrying him. I may have suggested, when I first saw him, that he seemed rather too much the type of the ordinary actor for you, but that was only because you yourself had always scoffed at actors so haughtily. Since I've known him I've grown to like him. Please don't think I ever objected to your marrying him. I never felt more sure about anybody's knowing her own mind than I do about you."

"Well, I am going to marry him," Sylvia said.

"Darling Sylvia, why do you say it so defiantly? Everybody will be delighted. Jack was talking only the other day about his perpetual dread that you'd never give yourself a chance of establishing your position finally, because you were so restless."

Sylvia contemplated an admission to Olive of having lived with Arthur for a year in America, but in this room the fact had an ugly look and seemed to belong rather to that evil face of the past that had confronted her with such ill omen this evening, rather than to anything so homely as marriage.

"Arthur may not be anything more than an actor," she went on. "But in my profession what else do I want? He has loved me for a long time; I'm very fond of him. It's essential that I should have a background so that I shall never be shaken out of my self-possession by anything like this evening's encounter. I've lived a life of feverish energy, and it's only since the improvisations that I can begin to believe it wasn't all wasted. I made a great mistake when I was seventeen, and when I was nineteen I tried to repair it with a still greater mistake. Then came Lily; she was a mistake. Oh, when I look back at it all, it's nothing but mistake after mistake. I long for such funny ordinary little pleasures. Olive darling, I've tried, I've tried to think I can do without love, without children, without family, without friends. I can't."

The tears were running swiftly, and all the time more swiftly, down Sylvia's cheeks while she was speaking. Olive jumped up from her soft and quilted chair and knelt beside her friend.

"My darling Sylvia, you have friends, you have, indeed you have."

"I know," Sylvia went on. "It's ungrateful of me. Why, if it hadn't been for you and Jack I should have gone mad. But just because you're so happy together, and because you have Sylvius and Rose, and because I flit about on the outskirts of it all like a timid, friendly, solitary ghost, I must have some one to love me. I've really treated Arthur very badly. I've kept him waiting now for a year. I wasn't brave enough to let him go, and I wasn't brave enough to marry him. I've never been undecided in my life. It must be that the gipsy in me has gone forever, I think. This success of mine has been leading all the time to settling down properly. Most of the people who came back to me out of the past were the nice people, like my old mistress and the grown-up twins, and I want to be like them. Oh, Olive, I'm so tired of being different, of people thinking that I'm hard and brutal and cynical. I'm not. Indeed I'm not. I couldn't have felt that truly appalling horror of Monkley this evening if I were really bad."

"Sylvia dear, you're working yourself up needlessly. How can you say that you're bad? How can you say such things about yourself? You're not religious, perhaps."

"Listen, Olive, if I marry Arthur I swear I'll make it a success. You know that I have a strong will. I'm not going to criticize him. I'm simply determined to make him and myself happy. It's very easy to love him, really. He's like a boy—very weak, you know—but with all sorts of charming qualities, and his mother would be so glad if it were all settled. Olive, I meant to tell you a whole heap of things about myself, about what I've done, but I won't. I'm going to forget it all and be happy. I'm glad it's Christmas-time. I've bought such ripping things for the kids. When I was buying them to-night there came into my head almost my first adventure when I was a very little girl and thought I'd found a ten-franc piece which was really the money I'd been given for the marketing. I had just such an orgy of buying to-night. Did you know that a giraffe could make a noise? Well, it can, or at any rate the giraffe I bought for Sylvius can. You twist its neck and it protests like a bronchial calf."

The party on Christmas Eve was a great success. Lucian Hope burnt a hole in the table-cloth with what was called a drawing-room firework. Jack split his coat trying to hide inside his bureau. Arthur, sitting on a bottle with his legs crossed, lit a candle, twice running. The little red-haired singer found the ring in the pudding. Sylvia found the sixpence. Nobody found the button, so it must have been swallowed. It was a splendid party. Sylvius and Rose did not begin to cry steadily until after ten o'clock.

When the guests were getting ready to leave, about two o'clock on Christmas morning, and while Lucian Hope was telling everybody in turn that somebody must have swallowed the button inadvertently, to prove that he was quite able to pronounce "inadvertently," Sylvia took Arthur down the front-door steps and walked with him a little

way along the foggy street.

"Arthur, I'll marry you when you like," she said, laying a hand upon his arm.

"Sylvia, what a wonderful Christmas present!"

"To us both," she whispered.

Then on an impulse she dragged him back to the house and proclaimed their engagement, which meant the opening of new bottles of champagne and the drinking of so many healths that it was three o'clock before the party broke up. Nor was there any likelihood of anybody's being able to say "inadvertently" by the time he had reached the corner of the street.

Arthur had begged Sylvia to come down to Dulwich on Christmas day, and Mrs. Madden rejoiced over the decision they had reached at last. There were one or two things to be considered, the most important of which was the question of money. Sylvia had spent the last penny of what was left of Morera's money in launching herself, and she owed nearly two hundred pounds besides. Arthur had saved nothing. Both of them, however, had been offered good engagements for the spring, Arthur to tour as lead in one of the Vanity productions, which might mean an engagement at the Vanity itself in the autumn; Sylvia to play a twenty minutes' turn at all the music-halls of a big circuit. It seemed unsatisfactory to marry and immediately afterward to separate, and they decided each to take the work that had been offered, to save all the money possible, and to aim at both playing in London next autumn, but in any case to be married in early June when the tours would end. They should then have a couple of months to themselves. Mrs. Madden wanted them to be married at once; but the other way seemed more prudent, and Sylvia, having once made up her mind, was determined to be practical and not to run the risk of spoiling by financial worries the beginning of their real life together. Her marriage in its orderliness and forethought and simplicity of intention was to compensate for everything that had gone before. Mrs. Madden thought they were both of them being too deliberate, but then she had run away once with her father's groom and must have had a fundamentally impulsive, even a reckless temperament.

The engagement was announced with an eye to the most advantageous publicity that is the privilege of being servants of the public. One was able to read everywhere of a theatrical romance or more coldly of a forthcoming theatrical marriage; nearly all the illustrated weeklies had two little oval photographs underneath which ran the legend:

#### INTERESTING ENGAGEMENT

We learn that Miss Sylvia Scarlett, who recently registered such an emphatic success in her original entertainment at the Pierian Hall, will shortly wed Mr. Arthur Madden, whom many of our readers will remember for his rendering of "Somebody is sitting in the sunset" at the Frivolity Theater.

In one particularly intimate paper was a short interview headed:

#### ACTRESS'S DELIGHTFUL CANDOR

"No," said Miss Scarlett to our representative who had called upon the clever and original young performer to ascertain when her marriage with Mr. Arthur Madden of "Somebody is sitting in the sunset" fame would take place. "No, Arthur and I have decided to wait till June. Frankly, we can't afford to be married yet...."

and so on, with what was described as a portrait of Miss Sylvia Scarlet inset, but which without the avowal would probably have been taken for the thumbprint of a paperboy.

"This is all terribly vulgar," Sylvia bewailed, but Jack, Arthur, and Olive were all firm in the need for thorough advertisement, and she acquiesced woefully. In January she and Arthur parted for their respective tours. Jack, before she went away, begged Sylvia for the fiftieth time to take back the money she had settled on her godchildren. He argued with her until she got angry.

"Jack, if you mention that again I'll never come to your house any more. One of the most exquisite joys in all my life was when I was able to do that, and when you and Olive were sweet enough to let me, for you really were sweet and simple in those days and not purse-proud *bourgeois*, as you are now. Please, Jack!" She had tears in her eyes. "Don't be unkind."

"But supposing you have children of your own?" he urged.

"Jack, don't go on. It really upsets me. I cannot bear the idea of that money's belonging to anybody but the twins."

"Did you tell Arthur?"

"It's nothing to do with Arthur. It's only to do with me. It was my present. It was made before Arthur came on the scene."

With great unwillingness Jack obeyed her command not to say anything more on the subject.

Sylvia earned a good enough salary to pay off nearly all her debts by May, when her tour brought her to the suburban music-halls and she was able to amuse herself by house-hunting for herself and Arthur. All her friends, and not the least old ones like Gladys and Enid, took a profound interest in her approaching marriage. Wedding-presents even began to arrive. The most remarkable omen of the gods' pleasure was a communication she received in mid-May from Miss Dashwood's solicitors to say that Miss Dashwood had died and had left to Sylvia in her will the freehold of Mulberry Cottage with all it contained. Olive was enraptured with her good fortune, and wanted to telegraph to Arthur, who was in Leeds that week; but Sylvia said she would rather write:

DEAREST ARTHUR,—You remember my telling you about Mulberry Cottage? Well, the most wonderful thing has happened. That old darling, Miss Dashwood, the sister of Mrs. Gainsborough's captain, has left it to me with everything in it. It has of course for me all sorts of memories, and I want to tell you very seriously that I regard it as a sign, yes, really a sign of my wanderings and restlessness being forever finished. It seems to me somehow to consecrate our marriage. Don't think I'm turning religious: I shall never do that. Oh no, never! But I can't help being moved by what to you may seem only a coincidence. Arthur, you must forgive me for the way in which I've often treated you. You mustn't think that because I've always bullied you in the past I'm always going to in the future. If

you want me now, I'm yours *really*, much more than I ever was in America, much, much more. You *shall* be happy with me. Oh, it's such a dear house with a big garden, for London a very big garden, and it held once two such true hearts. Do you see the foolish tears smudging the ink? They're my tears for so much. I'm going to-morrow morning to dust our house. Think of me when you get this letter as really at last

Your

SYLVIA.

The next morning arrived a letter from Leeds, which had crossed hers:

MY DEAR SYLVIA,—I don't know how to tell you what I must tell. I was married this morning to Maimie Vernon. I don't know how I let myself fall in love with her. I never looked at her when she sang at the Pierian with you. But she got an engagement in this company and—well, you know the way things happen on tour. The only thing that makes me feel not an absolutely hopeless cad is that I've a feeling somehow that you were going to marry me more out of kindness and pity than out of love.

Forgive me.

ARTHUR.

"That funny little red-haired girl!" Sylvia gasped. Then like a surging wave the affront to her pride overwhelmed her. With an effort she looked at her other letters. One was from Michael Fane's sister:

HARDINGHAM HALL,  
HUNTS,  
*May, 1914.*

DEAR MISS SCARLETT,—My brother is back in England and so anxious to meet you again. I know you're playing near town at present. Couldn't you possibly come down next Sunday morning and stay till Monday? It would give us the greatest pleasure.

Yours sincerely,  
STELLA PRESCOTT-MERIVALE.

"Never," Sylvia cried, tearing the letter into small pieces. "Ah no! That, never, never!"

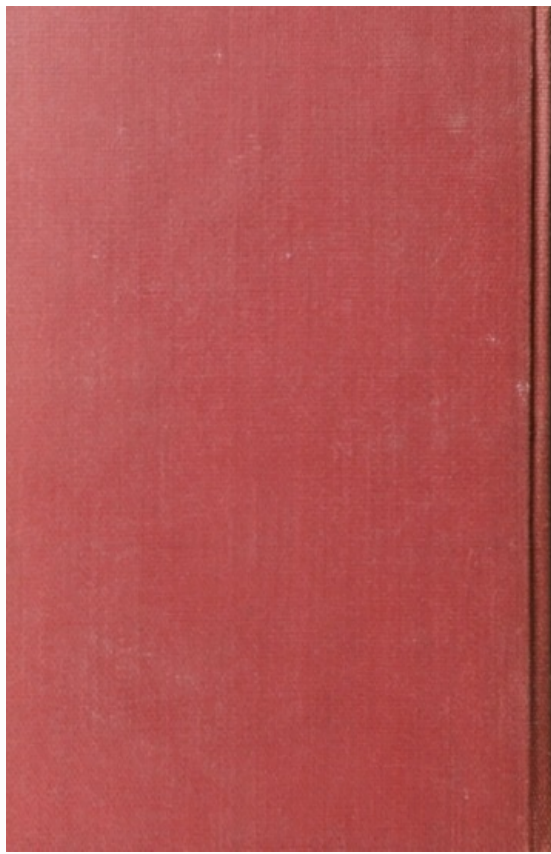
She left her rooms, and went to Mulberry Cottage. The caretaker fluttered round her to show her sense of Sylvia's importance as her new mistress. Was there nothing that she could do? Was there nothing that she could get?

Sylvia sat on the seat under the mulberry-tree in the still morning sunlight of May. It was impossible to think, impossible to plan, impossible, impossible. The ideas in her brain went slowly round and round. Nothing would stop them. Round and round they went, getting every moment more mixed up with one another. But gradually from the confusion one idea emerged, sharp, strong, insistent—she must leave England. The moment this idea had stated itself, Sylvia could think of nothing but the swiftness and secrecy of her departure. She felt that if one person should ever fling a glance of sympathy or condolence or pity or even of mild affection, she should kill herself to set free her outraged soul. She made no plans for the future. She had no reproaches for Arthur. She had nothing but the urgency of flight as from the Furies themselves. Quickly she went back to her rooms and packed. All her big luggage she took to Mulberry Cottage and placed with the caretaker. She sent a sum of money to the solicitors and asked them to pay the woman until she came back.

At the last moment, in searching through her trunks, she found the yellow shawl that was wrapped round her few treasures of ancestry. She was going to leave it behind, but on second thought she packed it in the only trunk she took with her. She was going back perhaps to the life of which these treasures were the only solid pledge.

"This time, yes, I'm off with the raggle-taggle gipsies in deadly earnest. Charing Cross," she told the taxi-driver.

THE END



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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EARLY LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SYLVIA SCARLETT \*\*\*

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