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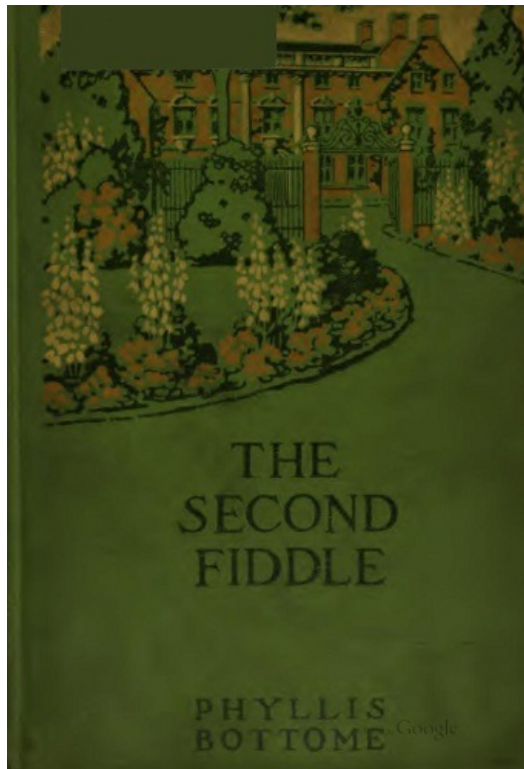
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BY
PHYLLIS BOTTOME
AUTHOR OF "THE DARK TOWER," "THE DERELICT
AND OTHER STORIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
NORMAN PRICE



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1917

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TO
MARGUERITE AND LILIAN
TWO SISTERS WHO, ALIKE IN JOY
AND SORROW, ARE A LIGHT
TO THEIR FRIENDS



"Then have the kindness to inform me ... why Marian has consented to marry me."

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| "Then have the kindness to inform me ... why Marian has consented to marry me" <i>Frontispiece</i> | |
| A proclamation was read by a great person from a bedizened balcony | 19 |
| "I'm afraid I don't like big feelings much" | 91 |
| "Women like you can't marry logs of wood" | 141 |
| "This," Stella thought to herself, "is like a battle" | 165 |
| Her voice was unfettered music | 189 |
| She tugged and twisted again | 265 |
| The most extraordinary figure we had ever seen | 295 |
| "Not very clever of you," he murmured, "not to guess why I wanted a taxi" | 349 |

THE SECOND FIDDLE

CHAPTER I

On the whole, Stella preferred the Cottage Dairy Company to the People's Restaurant. It was a shade more expensive, but if you ate less and liked it more, that was your own affair. You were waited on with more arrogance and less speed, but you made up for that artistically by an evasion of visible grossness.

Stella had never gone very much further than a ham sandwich in either place. You knew where you were with a ham sandwich, and you could disguise it with mustard.

On this occasion she took a cup of tea and made her meal an amalgamation. She hoped to leave work early, and she would have no time for tea. She was going to hear Chaliapine.

All London—all the London, that is, which thinks of itself as London—was raving about Chaliapine; but Stella in general neither knew nor cared for the ravings of London. They reached her as vaguely as the sound of breaking surf reaches the denizens of the deeper seas.

It was her sister Eurydice who had brought Chaliapine home to her. She had said quite plainly, with that intensity which distinguished both her utterances and her actions, that if she didn't hear Chaliapine she would die. He was like an ache in her bones.

Eurydice had never discovered that you cannot always do what you want or have what you very ardently wish to have. She believed that disappointment was a coincidence or a lack of fervency, and she set herself before each obstacle to her will like the prophets of Baal before their deaf god. She cut herself with knives till the blood ran.

Stella hovered anxiously by her side, stanching, whenever she was able, the flowing of Eurydice's blood. On this occasion she had only to provide seven shillings and to make, what cost her considerably more, a request to Mr. Leslie Travers to let her off at five.

Mr. Leslie Travers had eyed her with the surprise of a man who runs a perfect machine and feels it pause beneath his fingers. He could not remember that Stella Waring had ever made such a request before.

Her hours were from nine to five daily, but automatically, with the pressure of her work and the increase of her usefulness, they had stretched to six or seven.

Mr. Leslie Travers had never intended to have a woman secretary, but during the illness of a competent clerk he had been obliged to take a stop-gap. Miss Waring had appeared on a busy morning with excellent testimonials and a quiet manner. He told her a little shortly that he did not want a woman in his office. Her fine, humorous eyebrows moved upward, and her speculative gray eyes rested curiously upon his irritable brown ones.

"But I am a worker," she said gently. "If I can do your work, it is my own business whether I am a man or a woman. You shall not notice it."

Mr. Travers felt confused for a moment and as if he had been impertinent. In the course of a strenuous and successful life he had never felt impertinent; he believed it to be a quality found only in underlings. He stared, cleared his throat, read her testimonials, and temporarily engaged her. That was two years ago.

Miss Waring had kept her promise; she was a worker and not a woman. She took pleasure in keeping her wits about her, and Mr. Travers used them as if they were his own. Sometimes he thought they were.

She had many agreeable points besides her wits, but they were the only point she gave to Mr. Travers to notice. She deliberately suppressed her charm. She reduced his work by one half; he never had to say, "You ought to have asked me this," or, "You needn't have brought me that." Her initiative matched her judgment.

It did not occur to Mr. Travers to praise her for this most unusual quality, but he paid her the finest tribute of an efficient worker: he gave her more to do. He woke up to that fact when she tentatively asked him if he could make it convenient for her to leave at five.

"Five," he said, "is your hour for leaving this office. Of course you may go then. You ought always to do so."

A vague smile hovered about Stella's lips; she looked at him consideringly for a moment, her eyes seemed to say, "It must be nice for you, then, that I never do what I ought." Then she drew her secretarial manner like a veil over her face.

"You will find the drainage papers for Stafford Street in the second pigeon-hole on your desk," she said sedately, "with the inspector's report. I have put the plumber's estimate with it, and added a few marginal notes where I think their charges might be cut down."

"You had better see them about it yourself," said Mr. Travers; "then there won't be any unpleasantness."

He did not mean to be polite to Stella; he merely stated a convenient fact. When Stella saw people on business there was no unpleasantness.

Stella bowed, and left him.

Mr. Travers looked up for a moment after she had gone. "I am not sure," he said to himself, "that there are not some things women can do better than men when they do not know that they are doing them better." He did not like to think that women had any superior mental qualities to those of men, but he put them down to mother wit, which does not sound superior.

Stella went through the outer office on wings. It was full of her friends; her exits and her entrances were the events the lesser clerks liked best during the day.

Her smile soothed their feelings, and in her eyes reigned always that other Stella who lived

behind her wits, a gay, serene, and friendly Stella, who did not know that she was a lady and never forgot that she was a human being.

Theoretically there is nothing but business in a business office, but practically in every smallest detail there is the pressure of personal influence. What gets done or, even more noticeably, what is left undone, is poised upon an inadmissible principle, the desire to please.

The office watched Stella, tested her, judged her, and once and for all made up its mind to please her.

Stella knew nothing at all about this probation. She only knew all about the office boy's mother, and where the girl typists spent their holidays, and when, if all went well, Mr. Belk would be able to marry his young lady. Mistakes and panic, telegrams and telephones, slipped into her hands, and were unraveled with the rapidity with which silk yields to expert fingers. She always made the stupidest clerk feel that mistakes, like the bites of a mosquito, might happen to any one even while she was making him see how to avoid them in future. She had the touch which takes the sting from small personal defeats. She always saw the person first and the defeat afterward.

Her day's work was a game of patience and skill, and she played it as she used to play chess with her father. It was a long game and sometimes it was a tiring one, but hardly a moment of it was not sheer drama; and the moment the town hall door swung behind her she forgot her municipal juggling and started the drama of play.

On Thursday afternoon she stood for a moment considering her course. There was the Underground, which was always quickest, or there was the drive above the golden summer dust on the swinging height of a motor-bus. She decided upon the second alternative, and slipped into infinity. She was cut off from duty, surrounded by strangers, unmoored from her niche in the world.

This was the moment of her day which Stella liked best; in it she could lose her own identity. She let her hands rest on her lap and her eyes on the soft green of the new-born leaves. She hung balanced on her wooden seat between earth and sky, on her way to Russian music.

The brief and tragic youth of London trees was at its loveliest. Kensington Gardens poured past her like a golden flame. The grass was as fresh as the grass of summer fields, swallows flitted over it, and the broad-shouldered elms were wrapped delicately in a mist of green.

Hyde Park Corner floated beneath her; the bronze horses of victory, compact and sturdy, trundled out of a cloudless sky. St George's Hospital, sun-baked and brown, glowed like an ancient palace of the Renaissance. The traffic surged down Hamilton Place and along Piccadilly as close packed as migratory birds. The tower of Westminster Cathedral dropped its alien height into an Italian blue sky; across the vista of the green park and all down Piccadilly the clubs flashed past her, vast, silver spaces of comfort reserved for men, full of men. Stella did not know very much about men who lived in clubs. Cicely said they were very wicked and danced the tango and didn't want women to have votes; but Stella thought they looked as if they had attractions which rivaled these disabilities.

Probably she would see some of them less kaleidoscopically at the opera later.

Even men who danced the tango went to hear Chaliapine. It wasn't only his voice; he was a rage, a prairie fire. All other conversation became burned stubble at his name.

Piccadilly Circus shot past her like a bed of flowers.

The City was very hot, and all the world was in the streets, expansive and genial. It was the hour when work draws to an end and night is still far off. Pleasure had stretched down the scale and included workers. People who didn't dance the tango bought strawberries and flowers off barrows for wonderful prices to take home to their children.

In the queue extending half-way down Drury Lane, Eurydice, passionate and heavy-eyed, was waiting for Stella.

"If you hadn't come soon," she said, drawing Stella's arm through her own, "something awful would have happened to me. I got a messenger-boy to stand here for an hour to keep your place. The suspense has been agony, like waiting for the guillotine."

"But, O Eurydice dear, I do hope you will enjoy it!" Stella pleaded.

"I shall enjoy it, yes," said Eurydice, gloomily, "if I can bear it. I don't suppose you understand, but when you feel things as poignantly as I do, almost anything is like the guillotine. It is the death of something, even if it's only suspense. Besides, he may not be what I think him. I expect the opening of heaven."

Eurydice usually expected heaven to open, and this is sometimes rather hard upon the openings of less grandiose places.

A stout woman in purple raised an efficient elbow like an oar and dug it sharply into Stella's side.

"Oh, Stella, wouldn't it be awful if I fainted before the door opens!" whispered Eurydice.

"The doors are opening," said Stella. "People have begun to plunge with umbrellas."

The purple woman renewed her rowing motion; the patient queue expanded like a fan. Stella moved forward in the throng. She was pushed and elbowed, lifted and driven, but she never stopped being aware of delight. She watched the faces sweeping past her like petals on a stream; she flung down her half-crowns and seized her metal disks, dashing on and up the narrow stairs, with Eurydice fiercely struggling behind her like a creature in danger of drowning.

They sprang up and over the back ledges of the gallery on into the first row, breathless, gasping, and victorious.

"How horrible people are!" gasped Eurydice. "Dozens of brutal men have stepped on my toe. Your hat's crooked. Is anything worth this dreadful mingling with a mob?"

"Does one mingle really?" asked Stella, taking off her hat. "Only one's shoulders. Besides, I think I rather like mobs if they aren't purple and don't dig. I've just been thinking how dull it must be to walk into a box having done nothing but pay for it, and knowing, too, you are going to get it! The lady beside me has been to every opera this season. She sits on a camp-stool from two o'clock till eight with milk chocolate, and knows every one's name and all the motives and most of the scores. She's going to lend me this one. She says the excitement of not knowing whether she is going to get a front seat or not has never palled."

The great opera house filled slowly. There was splendor in it—the splendor put on for the occasion in the cheaper seats, and every-day splendor taking its place later and more expensively because it did not know how to be anything else but splendid.

Women's dresses that summer were made as much as possible to resemble underclothes. From the waist upwards filmy specimens of petticoat bodices appeared; there were wonderful jewels to be seen above them: immemorial family jewels, collars of rubies and pearls. The older the woman, the finer the jewels, and the more they looked like ancient mosaics glimmering archaically in early Roman churches.

The safety curtain was lowered reassuringly before a bored audience that was not afraid of danger.

Some one on the left of Stella remarked that there was a rumor that the Crown Prince and Princess of Austria had been assassinated in Serbia. It did not sound very likely. The Russian music began—fiery melancholy music, drunk with sorrow. Then the real curtain rose.

Eurydice flung herself forward; she hung over the ledge, poised like an exultant Fury. She dared life to disappoint her.

Stella leaned back in her seat with a little thrill of excitement. Everything felt so safe, and sorrow sounded beautiful, and far away.

CHAPTER II

The curtain lifted, and civilization swung back. They were in Russia in the twelfth century—or any other time. It hardly mattered when; the music was the perpetual music of the Slav, tragic and insecure. The people were a restless barbaric crowd, beyond or beneath morality; religious, incalculably led by sensation. They could be unimaginably cruel or sweep magnificently up the paths of holiness. The steep ascent to heaven was in their eyes, and they got drunk to attain it.

The English audience watched them as if they were looking at a fairy-tale. They were a well-fed, complacent audience. If they got drunk, it was an accident, and none of them had ever been holy. They had never been under the heels of tyranny or long without a meal. They took for granted food, water, light, and fuel. They began to live where the Russian peasant planted his dreams of heaven. Death was their only uncertainty, and it was hidden behind the baffling insincerities of doctors and nurses. It did not take them on the raw.

The crowd upon the stage became suddenly shaken into movement. Fires were lighted, bells rang, food was carried about in processions. Cossacks with long knouts struck back the dazzled, scattering people. A proclamation was read by a great person from a bedizened balcony.



A proclamation was read by a great person from a bedizened balcony

Stella knew no Russian; she had no idea that anything worse could happen to this seriously broken people ruled by knouts. But there was still something that could happen: this proclamation touched their religion.

It seemed that they actually had a possession that they weren't prepared to let go. They could let their daughters and sons go, their houses and their lives; but there was something they held on to and refused to renounce.

This was enough to irritate any tyrant. The bare existence of anything that is uncontrollable always annoys a tyrant. There was a power in these people still unsubdued, so the proclamation said that unless they gave up their religion and became orthodox they would be killed. Then Chaliapine entered.

Eurydice gave a long gasp of emotion, and sank silently into her dream; no more could be expected of her as a companion. Stella endeavored to be more critical. She felt at once that Chaliapine's power wasn't his voice. It was a fine, controlled voice, it seemed more resonant and alive than any other in the company, and vastly easier; but his genius was behind his voice. It was not merely his acting, though immediately every one else on the stage appeared to be acting, and Chaliapine alone was real.

It consisted in that very uncontrollable something that tyrants cannot kill, that circumstances do not touch, that surmounts every stroke of fate, and is the residuum which faces death. There was a little more of it in Chaliapine than there is in most people.

She tried to follow the score of "Boris Goudonoff"; it was not easy music, and the story hardly seemed to matter.

Chaliapine was the leader of the religious sect that the Czar was going to stamp out. Everything was against him; was he going to conquer? The English audience expected him to conquer. It understood conquests. First, you started all wrong, because you hadn't taken the trouble not to, because you hadn't measured your antagonist, and because you did not think that preparation was necessary.

The audience allowed for things going wrong to begin with, and sat cheerfully expecting the miracle.

The opera went on, and it became apparent to Stella that Chaliapine was not going to get his people out of their difficulties.

They sank deeper and deeper into them. Tyranny was behind and in front of them; they were being steadily hemmed in and beaten down. What they held on to did them no apparent good; it didn't comfort them or relieve their necessities or hold out a helping hand to them. It did nothing against their enemies. It simply burned in them like a flame. It didn't even consume them; it left them to be consumed by the Czar.

The English audience listened breathlessly and a little surprised, but not troubled, because they

felt quite sure that everything would come out all right in the last act.

Religion would triumph, it always did, even when you took no notice of it.

You didn't, as a rule, notice the police either, and yet when burglars broke in to steal your plate, they were caught climbing over the back fence by a policeman. Religion was there, like the police, to catch your troubles and restore your spiritual silver plate.

The melancholy minor Russian music couldn't mean that you weren't going to get anything out of it. It would wake up soon and be triumphant.

In the pauses between the acts Eurydice sat in a trance. Stella amused herself with picking out the kind of people she would have liked to know. One in particular in a box to the right of them, she found herself liking. His frosty-blue eyes had the consciousness of strength in them; the line of his jaw and the ironic, well-chiseled mouth spoke of a will that had felt and surmounted shocks. He was still a young man in the early thirties, but he had made his place in the world. He looked as secure as royalty. With a strange little thrill that was almost resentment Stella realized that she knew the woman beside him. Marian sat there very straight and slim in the guarded radiance of her youth, as intact as some precious ivory in a museum. She was Stella's greatest friend; that is to say, she gave to her the greatest amount of pleasure procurable in her life.

Stella couldn't have told why her heart sprang to meet Marian Young's. She had nothing in common with her. They had met at a course of lectures on the Renaissance, and out of a casual meeting had grown a singular, unequal, relationship.

Marian saw Stella very rarely, but she told her everything. She hadn't, however, told her of this new man. His strong, clever face had in it something different, something unnecessarily different, from Marian's other young men.

He lifted his head, and looked up toward the balconies above him. His eyes did not meet Stella's, but she took from them the strangest sensation of her life. A pang of sheer pity shot through her. There was no reason for pity; he looked aggressively strong and perfectly sure of himself. He even looked sure of Marian, and not without reason. He was all the things Marian liked best in a man, courageous, successful, handsome. Providence had thrown in his brains. That was the unnecessary quality.

Stella wondered a little wistfully what it must be like to talk to a really clever man. Her father was very clever, but he was not socially pliable, and he didn't exactly talk to Stella; he merely expressed in her presence conclusions at which he had arrived. It clarified his ideas, but it didn't do anything particular to Stella's.

Sir Richard Verny was taking trouble to talk to Marian; he bent his powerful head toward the girl and told her about Siberia. He knew Siberia well; he had often started from there upon important Arctic explorations. Marian wondered when he was going to propose. Siberia did as well as anything else till then. She knew he was going to propose; she didn't know anything at all about Siberia. She did not see Stella; it had not occurred to her that any one she knew could be sitting in the gallery.

The curtain rose again, and the last act began.

Chaliapine did not turn defeat into victory; no rabbit rose triumphantly, to satisfy the British public, out of a top-hat. Chaliapine led his people into a fire, and they were burned to death.

Some of them were frightened, and he had to comfort them, to hold them, and sustain them till the end. He had nothing at all to do it with, but he did sustain them. They all went into the flames, singing their disheartening music till the smoke covered them. Chaliapine sang longest, but there was nothing victorious in his last notes. They were very beautiful and final; then they weakened and were still.

The stillness went on for some time afterward. Everybody had been killed, and life had been so unendurable that they had faced death without much effort to avoid it. They could have avoided it if they had given up their faith. Their faith had vanished off the face of the earth, but they hadn't given it up.

Stella gave a long sigh of relief; she felt as if she had been saved from something abominable that might have happened.

Applause broke out all round them, a little uncertainly at first, because it was difficult for the audience to realize that the heavens weren't going to shoot open and do something definitely successful about it; but finally sustained and prolonged applause. Chaliapine had taken them all by storm. It was not the kind of storm that they were used to, but it was a storm.

"I love Russians," a lady exclaimed to Stella. "Such delightful people, don't you think, so full of color and what d' you call it?"

Eurydice shook herself impatiently like a dog after a plunge through water.

"Hurry! Let's get out of this," she said to Stella, "or I shall be rude to somebody. Idiots! Idiots! Don't they see that we've been listening to the defeat of the soul?"

"No, no," whispered Stella half to herself; "we've been listening to how it can't be defeated, how nothing touches it, not even death, not even despair, not even flames. The end of something that

has never given in is victory."

They passed behind Marian outside the opera house, but Stella did not speak to her. She heard Sir Julian saying in a determined, resonant voice: "Well, of course I'm glad you liked it. Chaliapine is a good workman, but personally I don't think much of Russian music. It has a whine in it like a beggar's, sounds too much as if it had knocked under. My idea, you know, is not to knock under."

And Stella, slipping into the crowd, was aware again of a sharp pang of pity for him, as if she knew that, after all, his strength would meet and be consumed by fire.

CHAPTER III

Nothing in No. 9 Redcliffe Square ever got done; it happened, as leaves drop in autumn, or as dust accumulates, percolating softly and persistently through doors and windows.

The Warings had reached Redcliffe Square as accidentally as a tramp takes shelter under a hedge. Professor Waring, whose instinct was to burrow like a mole, blind and silent, into his researches, failed too completely to teach what he had discovered; and as he had never made the discovery that teaching was what he was paid for, his payments gradually ceased. When he found himself faced with an increasing family and a decreasing income, he thought of the South Kensington Museum. He thought of it as an habitual drunkard evicted for not paying his rent, thinks of the public house.

He brought his family as near to it as he could, dumped them down in a silent and slatternly street, and disappeared into the museum regularly every morning at nine. When he came out he wanted only cocoa, a back room, and the postage necessary for his researches. A Peruvian mummy went to his head like gin.

Mrs. Waring had been a gentle, dreamy girl with a strong religious tendency. She had married Professor Waring because he had wide blue eyes and a stoop and did not look at all coarse.

Professor Waring had married her because he wanted to get married a little and had noticed her at that time. He was under the impression that women managed households, meals, and children without bothering their husbands. Mrs. Waring tried not to bother her husband. She lost her religion because the professor hadn't any, and she thought at first he was sure to be right. When she ceased to have this magic certainty, she sought out fresh religions that told you you had everything you wanted when you knew you hadn't.

She got through maternity in a desultory way, with a great deal of ill health and enormous household bills. She did not manage anything, and when she was very unhappy she said that she was in tune with the infinite.

From their earliest years her children fended for themselves, Eurydice with storms of anguish and through a drastic series of childish epidemics; Cicely with a stolid, cold efficiency; and Stella with an intuitive gentleness so great as to hide a certain inner force.

About two hundred pounds a year trickled in on them from uncertain sources. Mrs. Waring never knew quite when to expect it, and when it came it soaked itself solemnly up on non-essentials. The children never had proper clothes or a suitable education. They were Egyptologists before they could spell, and the Koran was an open book to them when they should have been reading "The Water Babies."

The professor spent what he considered his share of their income upon hieroglyphics, and Mrs. Waring, never personally extravagant, bought quantities of little books to teach people how to live, how to develop the will, how to create a memory, and power through repose. They had one servant, who had to have wages and insisted every now and then upon a joint of meat.

There was no waste-paper basket in the house, and a great deal of linoleum. When Mrs. Waring made up her mind that she must be more economical, she always went out and bought linoleum. She had been told it was a great saving. She never tidied anything up or put anything away. What was lost was never seen again, or seen only when you were hunting for something else. It was like a gambler's system at Monte Carlo: you looked for a bootjack, and were rewarded by black treacle; or you played, as it were, for black treacle, and discovered the bootjack.

Mrs. Waring never finished anything; even her conversations, which began at breakfast, jogged on throughout the day, and were picked up at much the same spot in the evening. She had covered a quantity of ground, but she had invariably escaped her destination. Through long years of perpetual indecision she had nearly succeeded in outwitting time and space.

Nobody minded this attitude except Cicely. She fought against chaos from her youth up. They all dreaded her tongue and clung persistently to their habits. The professor fled earlier to the museum, sometimes in carpet slippers. Immediately after breakfast Mrs. Waring retired with a little book to an untidied bedroom.

Eurydice, dropping manuscripts, hair-ribbons, and defiance, escaped to a locked attic; and Stella remained as a gentle adjutant to her severer sister. Cicely did get a few things done. She saw

that meals were cooked, windows opened, beds made, and clocks wound; but nothing continuous rewarded her efforts. The power of the human will is a small weapon against consolidated inertia.

For five years Cicely played upon No. 9 Redcliffe Square like an intermittent searchlight; then she gave it up, and became a student in a women's hospital. The household breathed a sigh of intense relief at her departure, and collapsed benevolently into chaos.

Nobody except Stella regretted it. The professor was openly thankful.

"She may become a student," he observed coldly when it was explained to him where Cicely had gone, "but she will never become a scholar. She has a superficial hunger for the definite.

"I really do not think it will be necessary for me to take my supper at a given hour. Stella will know that, whenever I ring my bell, I mean cocoa."

"Dear Cicely is a pioneer," murmured Mrs. Waring, with a gentle sigh. "I can always imagine her doing wonderful things in a desert with a buffalo."

"Now I shall be able to have my friends at the house without their being insulted," cried Eurydice, triumphantly. "Last time when Mr. Bolt was in the middle of reading his new poem, 'The Whirl,' a most delicate and difficult poem set to a secret rhythm, Cicely burst in and asked for the slop-pail. It looked so lovely! I had covered it with autumn leaves and placed it half-way up the chimney. It might have been a Grecian urn, but of course she dragged it out. She drags out everything."

Eurydice had a profession, too. She was a suppressed artist. She felt that she could have painted like Van Gogh, only perfectly individually. She saw everything in terms of color and in the shape of cubes. Railway lines reminded her of a flight of asterisks. Flowers subdivided themselves before her like a tartan plaid. She saw human beings in tenuous and disjointed outlines suggestive of a daddy-long-legs. She could not afford paint and canvas, so she had to leave people to think that the world looked much as usual.

Eurydice had always felt that she could write out her thoughts as soon as she and Stella were alone and able to arrange her room in black and scarlet. When Cicely left, Stella bought black paper and pasted it over the walls, and dyed a white-wool mat, which had long lost its original purity, a sinister scarlet.

Eurydice did not want very much, either. None of the Waring's wanted very much. What as a family they failed to understand was, that not having the money to pay for what they wanted, some more personal contribution of time and effort was necessary in order to attain it.

Stella grasped this fact when she was about eighteen. She said afterward that she never would have thought of it if it had not been made plain to her by Cicely. Still, before Cicely had gone to the hospital Stella was taking cheap lessons in the City in shorthand and type-writing. None of the three girls had what is called any "youth." They were as ignorant of young men as if they had been brought up in a convent. Neither Professor nor Mrs. Waring had ever supposed that parents ought to provide occupations or social resources for their children, and the children themselves had been too busy contributing to the family welfare to manage any other life. Cicely had read statistics and mastered physiological facts at fifteen. She was under the impression that she knew everything and disliked everything except work. Her feeling for men was singularly like that of a medieval and devout monk toward women. She had an uncomfortable knowledge of them as a necessary evil, to be evaded only by truculence or flight. When her work forced her into dealings with them, she was ferocious and unattractive. She was a pretty girl, but nobody had ever dared to mention it to her.

Even Stella, who in an unaggressive, flitting way dared most questions, had avoided telling Cicely that she herself liked men. Stella often felt that if she could meet a man who was capable of doing all kinds of dull things for you, very charmingly, and had a pretty wit, it would add quite enormously to the gaiety of life to put yourself out a little in order to make him laugh.

The men Stella worked with wouldn't have done at all. They wouldn't have cared for the kind of jokes Stella wanted to make, and of course Stella hadn't time to meet any other men. Perhaps she wouldn't have believed there were any if it hadn't been for Marian. Marian knew them; she knew them literally in dozens, and they were generally in love with her, and they always wanted to make her laugh and to do dull things for her. Stella used to be afraid sometimes that Marian, in an embarrassment of riches, might overlook her destiny. But Marian knew what she wanted and was perfectly certain that she would sooner or later get it. Stella had no such knowledge; she had long ago come to the conclusion that the simplest way of dealing with her life was to like what she had.

She took a scientific secretaryship at nineteen, and left it only at twenty-six, when her scientist, who was very stout and nearly sixty, died inconveniently from curried lobster. He left Stella an interesting experience, of which she could make no immediate use, and a testimonial which won her job at the town hall. It was very short. "This young woman," the learned scientist wrote, "is invaluable. She thinks without knowing it. I have benefited by this blessed process for seven years."

It did not seem to Stella that she was invaluable. She always saw herself in the light of the family failure, overlooking the fact that she was their main financial support.

Cicely was the practical and Eurydice the intellectual genius; but she was content if she could be the padding on which these jewels occasionally shone.

Sometimes she met Cicely in a tea-shop and had a real talk, but Eurydice was her chief companion. Eurydice shared with Stella nearly every thought that she had. She seized her on the stairs to retail her inspirations as Stella went up to take her things off. She sat on her bed late at night, and talked with interminable bitterness about the sharpness of life. Even while Stella buttoned up her boots and flung things at the last moment into her despatch-case, Eurydice pelted her with epigrams. She sometimes quoted Swinburne while Stella was jumping on the corner bus, till the bus-conductor told her not to let him catch her at it again. There was only one subject they did not discuss: neither of them voluntarily mentioned Mr. Bolt. Mr. Bolt was the editor of a magazine called "Shocks," to which Eurydice with trembling delight contributed weekly. Mr. Bolt had met her at a meeting of protest against Reticence, and he had taken to Eurydice at once; and almost at once he told her that her charm was purely intellectual. Emotionally he was appealed to only by fair, calm women with ample figures.

Mr. Bolt knew plenty of fair, calm women with ample figures. Eurydice only knew Mr. Bolt. She made an idol of him, and he used her like a door-mat. No early-Victorian woman ever bore from a male tyrant what poor, passionate twentieth-century Eurydice bore from Mr. Bolt, and Stella could not help her. Stella abhorred Mr. Bolt. She would not listen to his Delphic oracle utterances upon style and art and life. She was outraged at his comments upon sex. She was desperately, fiercely angry with a secret maternal anger that Eurydice should have to listen to these utterances. It carried her as far as an abortive appeal to her mother.

"My dear," said Mrs. Waring, placidly, "these things are outworn. They are stultified thought products; they do not really exist. Sex is like dust upon the house-tops; a cleansing process will shortly remove it. Mr. Bolt is a misconception, a floating microcosm. I really should not bother about Mr. Bolt. He is not nearly so tangible as the butcher, and I have made up my mind never really again to bother about the butcher. Perhaps you will see him for me if he calls about his bill to-morrow.

"It seems so strange to me that business men should not understand that when there is no money bills cannot be paid. Even the minor regions of fact seem closed to them."

Stella agreed to dip into the minor regions of fact with the butcher, but she went on bothering about Mr. Bolt. It seemed to Stella that he was the only real bother that she had.

CHAPTER IV

Darling:

Do come Sunday to tea. Mama is out of town, and I must have some support. Julian is going to bring his mother to see me for the first time. I believe she's rather alarming—awfully blue and booky; just your sort. I haven't had time to tell you anything. It's so jolly being engaged; but it takes up all one's spare moments. I didn't mean to marry Julian; he swept me off my feet. I suppose I must be awfully in love with him. You know what explorers are. They go away for years and leave you to entertain alone, and then people say you don't get on; and of course exploring never pays. He has a little place in the country and about £2000 a year. It's awfully little, really, but it's wonderful what you can put up with when you really care for a man; besides, he's sure to get on. Don't fail me Sunday. I shall really be rather nervous. Old ladies never have been my forte. Julian is such a dear! You're sure to like him. He wants to meet you awfully, but he doesn't think women ought to work. He is full of chivalry, and has charming manners. It doesn't in the least matter what you wear. Heaps of love.

MARIAN.

It was this last reflection that gave Stella courage to ring the bell. She had never been in the Youngs' house before. She had vaguely known that it was in a very quiet square, with a garden in the middle, quite near everything that mattered, and quite far away from everything that didn't. It was the kind of house that looks as if no one was in it unless they were giving a party. The interior was high, narrow, and box-like. A great deal of money had been unpretentiously spent on it, with a certain amount of good-humored, ordinary taste.

The drawing-room ran the whole length of the house, and was pink and gray, because the Youngs knew that pink and gray go well together, just as blue and gold do, only that blue fades.

The chairs were very comfortable, the little tables had the right kind of ornaments, the pictures were a harmless, unenlightening addition to the gray-satin walls.

The books that lay about were novels. They were often a little improper, but never seriously so, and they always ended in people getting what they wanted legally.

It was a clean, comfortable, fresh room and nothing was ever out of place in it.

Marian was sitting under a high vase of pink canterbury-bells; by some happy chance her dress

was the same pale pink as the bells. She looked, with her hands in her lap, her throat lifted, and the sun on her hair, like a flower of the same family. Her manner was a charming mixture of ease and diffidence.

Stella was late, and Lady Verny and Julian had arrived before her.

Lady Verny was like her son. She was very tall and graceful, and carried herself as if she had never had to stoop. Her eyes had the steady, frosty blueness of Julian's, with lightly chiseled edges; her lips were ironic, curved, and a little thin.

She had piles of white hair drawn back over her forehead. When Marian introduced her to Stella, she rose and turned away from the tea-table.

"I hope you will come and talk to me a little," she said in a clear, musical voice. "We can leave Julian and Marian to themselves."

Lady Verny leaned back in the chair she had chosen for herself and regarded Stella with steady, imperturbable eyes. It struck Stella as a little alarming that they should all know where they wanted to sit, and with whom they wanted to talk, without any indecision. She thought that chairs would walk across the room to Lady Verny if she looked at them, and kettles boil the moment Julian thought that it was time for tea. But though she was even more frightened at this calm, unconscious competency than she had expected to be, she saw it didn't matter about her clothes. She knew they were all wrong, as cheap clothes always are, particularly cheap clothes that you've been in a hurry over and not clever enough to match. Her boots and her gloves weren't good, and her hat was horrid and probably on the back of her head. Her blue-serge coat and skirt had indefinite edges. But Stella was aware that Lady Verny, beautifully dressed as she was, was taking no notice whatever of Stella's clothes. They might make an extra point against her if she didn't like her. Stella could hear her saying, "Funny that Marian should make friends with a sloppy little scarecrow." But if she did like her, she would say nothing about Stella's clothes. As far as the Vernys were concerned, the appearances of things were always subsidiary.

"Engagements are such interrupted times," Lady Verny observed, with a charming smile. "One likes to poke a little opportunity toward the poor dears when one can."

"Yes," said Stella, eagerly, with her little, rapid flight of words. "You're always running away when you're engaged, and never getting there, aren't you? And then, of course, when you're married, you're there, and can't run away. It's such a pity they can't be more mixed up."

"Perhaps," said Lady Verny, still smiling. "But marriage is like a delicate clock; it has to be wound up very carefully, and the less you take its works to pieces afterward the better. Have you known Marian a long time?"

"Three years," said Stella; "but when you say 'know,' I am only an accident. I don't in any real sense belong to Marian's life; I belong only to Marian. You see, I work." She thought she ought, in common fairness to Lady Verny, not let her think that she was one of Marian's real friends.

Lady Verny overlooked this implication.

"And what is your work, may I ask?" she inquired, with her grave, solid politeness, which reminded Stella of nothing so much as a procession in a cathedral.

"I was a secretary to Professor Paulson," Stella explained, "the great naturalist. He was a perfect dear, too,—it wasn't only beetles and things,—and when he died, I went into a town hall,—I've been there for two years,—and that's more exciting than you can think. It isn't theories and experiments, of course, but it's like being a part of the hub of the universe. Rates and taxes, sanitary inspectors, old-age pensions, and the health of babies run through my hands like water through a sieve. You wouldn't believe how entertaining civic laws and customs are—and such charming people! Of course I miss the other work, too,—it was like having one's ear against nature,—but this is more like having one's ear against life."

"I think you must have very catholic tastes," said Lady Verny, gently. "My son knew Professor Paulson; it will interest him to know that you worked for him. And Marian—did she take any interest in your scientific experiences?"

Stella moved warily across this question; she had never spoken to Marian about her work at all. Marian, as she knew, thought it all very tiresome.

"You see," she explained, "they weren't my experiences; they were Professor Paulson's. Marian couldn't very well be thrilled at third hand; the thrill only got as far as me. Besides, half of what I do as a secretary is confidential, and the other half sounds dull. Of course it isn't really. I've been so lucky in that way. I've never had anything dull to do."

"I can quite imagine that," said Lady Verny, kindly. "Dullness is in the eye, not in the object. Does Marian like life better than intellect, too?"

"Ah, Marian's life," said Stella, a little doubtfully, "is so different!"

They glanced across at the distant tea-table. Julian was leaning toward Marian with eyes that held her with the closeness of a frame to a picture.

He was laughing at her a little, with the indulgent, delighted laughter of a man very deeply in love. She was explaining something to him, simply and gravely, without undue emphasis. Stella

guessed that it was one of the things Marian wanted, and she did not think that Julian could get out of giving it to her by laughter.

"Marian's life hasn't got divisions in it like mine," she explained. "She's just a beautiful human creature. She is equable and strong and delightful and absolutely honest. She's as honest as crystal; but she hasn't had to bother about choosing."

"Ah," said Lady Verny, "you think that, do you? But, my dear Miss Waring, sooner or later we all have to bother about choosing. Beauty and strength don't save us. Absolute honesty often lets us in, and sometimes, when the scales weigh against us, we cease to be equable."

"But they won't, you see," Stella said eagerly. "They can't weigh against her now, Lady Verny. Don't you see? There's your son—it's why one's so delighted. An engagement to him is like some thumping insurance which somehow or other prevents one's house being burned."

Lady Verny laughed.

"Let us hope your theory is a correct one," she said, rising from her seat. "I am going to talk to her now, and you can talk to the insurance company."

Stella gasped. She wanted to run away, to catch Lady Verny's graceful scarf and tell her she couldn't really talk to anybody's son. Agreeable, massive beings who explored continents and lived in clubs oughtn't to come her way. But Julian crossed the room to her side with the quickness of a military order. His manners hid his reluctance. He was at her service in a moment. His keen eyes, harder than his mother's and more metallic, met hers once and glanced easily away. They said nothing to Stella except that he was a watchful human being who couldn't be taken in, and was sometimes perhaps unduly aware that he couldn't be taken in.

"I'm very glad indeed," he said cordially, "to meet Marian's greatest friend. You must tell me all about her. You see, I'm a new-comer; I've known her only six weeks, and I've been so busy trying to impress her with my point of view that I quite feel I may have overlooked some of hers. Women always understand women, don't they?"

He wasn't going to be difficult to talk to. That unnecessary ingredient in his composition saved Stella. As long as she had a brain to call to, and wasn't only to be awed by splendor of appearance and forms as difficult for her to cross as five-barred gates, she needn't be afraid of him. It never was people that Stella was afraid of, but the things, generally the silly things, that separated her from them.

"We do and we don't understand each other," she said swiftly. "I don't think women can tell what another woman will do; but granted she's done it, I dare say most could say why."

Julian laughed.

"Then have the kindness to inform me," he said, "why Marian has consented to marry me. Incidentally, your reply will no doubt throw a light for me upon her mental processes."

Stella saw he did not want any light thrown anywhere; he was simply giving his mother time to get to know Marian. Then he was going back to her; that was his light.

She gave a vague little smile at the sublimated concentration of lovers. She liked to watch them; she would never have to be one.

It was like seeing some beautiful wild creature of the woods. It wouldn't be like you at all, and yet it would be exceedingly amusing and touching to watch, and sometimes it would make you think of what it would feel like to be wild and in those woods.

She reminded herself sharply, as her eyes turned back to Julian, that it wouldn't do to let him think she thought him wild. He was behaving very well, and the least she could do was to let him think so. She gave herself up to his question.

"You're very strong," she said consideringly. "Marian likes strength. She's strong herself, you know; probably that's one of her reasons."

"Good," he said cheerfully. "Physically strong, d' you mean, or an iron will? Iron wills are quite in my line, I assure you. Any other reason?"

"Strong both ways," said Stella; "and you're secure. I mean, what you've taken you'll keep. I think some women like a man they can be sure of."

"Let us hope they all do," said Sir Julian, laughing. "It would imply a very bad business instinct if they didn't."

"I do not think I agree with you," said Stella, firmly. "The best business is often an adventure, a risk. Safe business does not go far; it goes only as far as safety."

"Well, I'm not sure that I want women to go particularly far," said Sir Julian. "I like 'em to be safe; let 'em leave the better business with the risk in it to men. I shall be content if Marian does that."

"I think Marian will," said Stella. "But there are other things, of course, besides you and Marian: there's life. You can only take all the risk there is if you take all the life. I see what you would like, Sir Julian: you want a figurehead guaranteed against collisions. Unfortunately there's no guarantee against collisions even for a figurehead. Besides, as I told you before, Marian's strong."

Iron wills don't make good figureheads."

"Ah, you're one of these new women," said Sir Julian, indulgently. "I don't mind 'em a bit, you know, myself—all steel and ginger,—and quite on to their jobs. I admit all that. But Marian ain't one of them. Her strength is the other kind—the kind you get by sitting still, don't you know; and if I may say so in passing, if I run a ship, I don't collide. But let's have your third reason. I see you're keeping something back. She's going to marry me because I'm strong and because I'm sure; I approve of both of them, sound business reasons. Now, Miss Waring, what's the third?"

"Ah, the third isn't a reason at all," said Stella; "but it's the only one that I thoroughly agree with as a motive: she likes you for yourself."

Sir Julian's eyes suddenly softened; they softened so much that they looked quite different eyes, almost as if they belonged to a very pleased little boy.

"Oh," he said, looking back at Marian. "I shouldn't in the least mind being guaranteed that, you know."

Lady Verny rose and walked toward them.

"I have some other calls to make," she said to her son. "You'll stay, of course."

Stella joined her as soon as she had given the happiest of her smiles into Marian's expectant eyes. Lady Verny's face, as they stood together outside the door, was perfectly expressionless.

Without a word she descended the stairs side by side with Stella. When she reached the front door she held out her hand to Stella and smiled.

"I hope I shall meet you again some day," she said, with gracious sincerity. "I enjoyed our little talk together very much."

She said nothing whatever about Marian.

CHAPTER V

It was a very hot morning in July, a morning when work begins slowly, continues irritably, and is likely to incite human paroxysms of forgetfulness and temper. It took the form with Mr. Leslie Travers of his being more definite than usual. He was an extremely intelligent man, and most of his intelligence consisted in knowing where other people were wrong. The heat lent an almost unbearable edge to these inspirations; the office boy, the mayor's secretary, and two typists withdrew from his sanctum as if they had been in direct contact with a razor.

Stella wished, as she had often wished before, that the inner office in which she worked could not be invaded by the manner in which Mr. Travers conducted his interviews. She respected him as her chief, she even considered him with a kind of loyal awe augmented by her daily duty. She pleased him, she catered for him, she never in any circumstances let him down or confused him by a miscalculation or a mistake.

It is impossible to do this for any man for two years and, if he has treated you with fairness and respect, not at the end of that time, to regard him with a certain proprietary affection. This was how Stella regarded Mr. Travers. He was a clever man, and he never expected any one under him to work miracles or to give him trouble. He knew what you were worth, and sometimes he let you see it.

He was handsome in a thin, set, rather dry way, and when he put his finger-tips together and smiled a little ironic smile he had, and leaned forward with his shoulders hunched and his eyes unusually bright, as if they'd been polished like a boot-button, he had an air of intellectual strength which usually brought terror to an opponent. He always knew when his adversary was in the wrong. It sometimes seemed to Stella as if he never knew anything else.

He had reduced life to a kind of game in which you caught the other fellow out. She got very tired of hearing him say, "You see, Miss Waring, the weak point of this case is—" or, "I think we may just point out to him that he renders himself liable to—"

He was a master hand at an interview. To begin with, he always let the interviewer state his case completely. He never interrupted; he would sit there smiling a little with his steady, observant eyes fixed on the man before him, saying in a suave, mild voice, "Yes, yes; I quite see. Exactly. Your point is—" and Stella, listening, would feel her heart sink at the dangerous volubility of his opponent. She would have liked to spring from behind the screen where she was sorting the correspondence and say, "For Heaven's sake! keep that back! You're letting yourself in!" As soon as the usually verbose and chaotic applicant had drawn his final breath, Mr. Leslie Travers gave him back his case with the points eliminated, and the defenseless places laid out before him as invertebrate and unmanageable as a jellyfish. It was hardly necessary for Mr. Leslie Travers to say, with his dry little smile, "I think you see, my dear fellow, don't you, that it would really be advisable in your own interests not to go on any further with the matter? It will be no trouble to us at all if you decide to push it, but if you take my advice, you will simply go home and think no more about it." People usually went home, and if their case had been important to them, they

probably thought about it to the end of their lives; but that didn't affect Mr. Travers. It was his business to safeguard the interests of the town hall, and the more cases you could drop, the better. Of course he never dropped a case that could be used against him; he held on to these until they couldn't. He had to perfection the legal mind. He never touched what wasn't a safe proposition. A peculiar idea seized Stella as she listened to him dismissing a worried rate-payer who had asked for lowered rates, claiming the decreased value of his property, "We shall act immediately," Mr. Travers said benevolently. "We receive proof that your property *has* decreased in value, but it doesn't do, you know, to come here and tell me the neighborhood isn't what it was. No neighborhood ever is. Good morning."

What, she asked herself, would Mr. Leslie Travers be without his impeccable tie, his black coat, and definitely creased gray trousers, the polish on his boots, the office background, and, above all, the law? Was he really very awe-inspiring. Wasn't he just a funny little man? It was curious how she felt this morning, as if she would have liked to see some one large and lawless face Mr. Travers and show him that his successes were tricks, his interviews mousetraps, his words delusive little pieces of very stale cheese. He was too careful of his dignity, too certain of his top-hat. You couldn't imagine him dirty and oily at the north pole, putting grit into half-frozen, starving men. You couldn't, that is to say, imagine him at a disadvantage, making the disadvantage play his game.

His games were always founded on advantages. He wasn't, in fact, at all like Julian Verny, nor was there any reason why he should be. But yesterday Stella had seen Julian Verny, and to-day she saw, and saw as if for the first time, Mr. Leslie Travers.

"Now, Miss Waring," Mr. Travers said, looking up from his desk, "the correspondence, please, if you are ready." He always spoke to her, unless he was in a hurry, as if he were speaking to a good, rather bright little girl who knew her place, but mustn't be tempted unduly to forget it. When he was in a hurry he sometimes said, "Look sharp."

Stella brought the correspondence, and they went through it together with their usual celerity and carefulness, and all the time she was thinking: "We've worked together every day for two years except Sundays, and he's afraid to look at me unless we're discussing a definite question, and he won't risk a joke, and he'd be shocked if I sneezed. He's just a very intelligent, cultivated, knowing clerk, and he'd be awfully upset if I told him he had a smut on his collar."

Mr. Leslie Travers put to one side the two or three letters he had reserved for himself to answer. Stella gathered hers together into an elastic band; but as she turned to leave him he said:

"Miss Waring, one moment. You came to me on the understanding that your work here was to be purely temporary. Circumstances have prolonged your stay with us until it seems to me that we may fairly consider you, unless you have other plans, a permanent member of our staff!"

"I hope so," said Stella, with a sudden flicker in her eyes, "unless you think women shouldn't be permanent."

Mr. Leslie Travers permitted himself a very slight smile.

"That disability in your case," he said, "we are prepared to overlook in view of your value as a worker. As my permanent secretary I should wish to raise your salary ten pounds yearly. I have put this before our committee, and they have seen their way to consent to it."

Stella's eyebrows went up. Ten pounds were worth so much to that muddled, penurious household standing behind her on the verge of utmost poverty! The man whose place she had taken had been paid three hundred a year; her rise brought up her salary to one third of this amount.

"It *is* a disability, Mr. Travers," she said gently, "being a woman. I see that it is going to cost me two hundred a year."

Mr. Travers looked at her very hard. He knew that she did her work twice as well as the man she had replaced. That is why she had replaced him. He thought of her market value as a worker, and he knew that he was doing a perfectly correct thing. A hundred a year was a fair wage for a woman secretary. He said:

"You see, Miss Waring, you have not got a family to support."

Stella flushed. She had a family to support, but she did not intend to admit it to Mr. Travers.. She said:

"I beg your pardon. I had not understood that wages were paid according to a worker's needs. I had thought the value of the work settled the rate of payment."

Mr. Travers was astonished. He had never dreamed that Miss Waring would argue with him. He had looked forward to telling her of this unexpected windfall; he had expected a flushed and docile gratitude. She was a little flushed, it is true, but she was neither docile nor grateful, and he did not quite see his way to continuing her line of argument. She had, however, put herself in the wrong, and he pointed this out to her.

"I am afraid I cannot see my way to offering you more than the increase I have suggested," he said; "but as you were apparently satisfied to accept a permanent post at my original offer, I may hope that an extra ten pounds will prove no obstacle to our continuing to work together."

"I do not suppose," said Stella, quietly, "that it will be any obstacle to you that I do not think it fair."

"Really, Miss Waring, really," said Mr. Travers, "I do not think you are quite yourself this morning. The heat, the disquieting news in the papers—Perhaps you had better go on with the correspondence. These questions are not personal ones, you know—they—"

Stella interrupted him.

"All questions that deal with human beings, Mr. Travers," she said, "are personal questions, and the heat does not affect them."

For one awful moment Mr. Travers thought that Miss Waring was laughing at him; there was that strange glint in her eyes that he had noticed before. She had extraordinarily pretty eyes, usually so gentle. It was most upsetting.

She disappeared with her correspondence before he could think of a suitable reply. Legally he had been perfectly justified, more than justified, because he was under no obligation to offer her ten pounds more.

This is what comes of generosity to women. If he hadn't offered her that ten pounds she wouldn't have laughed at him, if she really had laughed at him.

It was a most disquieting thought; it haunted him all day long, even more than the possibility of a European war. He couldn't help the European war if it did come off, but he wished very much that he had been able to prevent Miss Waring's enigmatic laughter.

CHAPTER VI

When anything happened, Julian's first instinct was to happen with it. He had never been in the rear of a situation in his life. The blow of the Austrian ultimatum reached him on a yacht in mid-channel. There was a cabinet minister on board, for whose sake the yacht slewed round to make her way swiftly back to port. Julian went directly to him.

"Look here," he said, "we've got to go in. You grasp that, don't you?"

Julian had one idea in his head, the cabinet minister had a great many; every one but Julian was leaving him alone to sort these ideas out. Julian spent the six hours in which they were flying to port in eradicating one by one every idea except his own.

The two men stood together, leaning over the ship's side. It was a clear summer evening, with a bloom upon the waters. The lights of the boats they passed—green and red and gold—were like glow-worms in a Southern night. The sea was very easy under them; it had little movement of its own, and parted like riven gauze to let the ship through.

"We can't let France go under," Julian pleaded. "Look at her, son—stripped, after 1870. How she's sprung up! But thin, you know—thin, like a gallant boy.

"Immoral small families? By Gad! how righteous comfortable people are! How could she help it? Look what she's had to carry—indemnities, cursed war burdens, and now the three-years service! But she's carried 'em. I know the French. I've Irish in me, and that helps me to value their lucidity. Lucidity's sense, you know, it ain't anything dressy or imaginative, it's horse-sense gone clean as lightning. The French are a civilized people. Go to Paris,—not the Paris of our luxury-rotted rich, who have only asked it to be a little private sink of their own,—but to a Frenchman's Paris. Well, you'll find him there, brain and a heart under it. And, good Lord, what nerve!

"I tell you we've got to get down to our own nerve. We've fatted it on the top, but the French haven't. They're like live wire, with no cover to it. They're the most serious people on earth, fire without smoke. It 'u'd be an unspeakable shame to help set that damned Prussian heel on them again. When it comes, it'll come as solid as the mountain that blotted out Messina, as solid and as senseless, and you'll let that happen because we aren't '*involved*!' Good Heavens, man, don't sop yourself or your conscience with catchwords! If this war comes, and I feel in my bones it's on us, any man who isn't involved is a cur."

The cabinet minister interrupted him. He cleared his throat, and said that he was hopeful steps might be taken.

Julian flung himself upon the phrase.

"Of course they'll be taken," he shouted across the quiet, shadowy sea. "They're being taken every minute. Are we the only fellows who've got feet?"

"What about strategic railways? Ever studied 'em? What about this spring's having seen Alsace and Lorraine white with camps? What about Tirpitz slipping his navy votes through the Reichstag, Socialists and all? I beg your pardon; it's not your department, of course. We've let a strip of sea as small as a South American river cut us off from the plain speech of other nations. What speech? My good sir, the plain speech of other nations is their acts. But it's no use raking up what we've slid over. We've the national habit of sliding, it's a gift like any other, and if you've

a good eye for ice, it doesn't let you in. But what Liberal Government ever had a good eye for the ice in Europe. I'm speaking bitterly, but I'm a Liberal myself, and I've seen in odd places of the earth that it's no good going slap through an adverse fact, smiling. You disarm nothing but yourself."

"We are not," said the cabinet minister, who had a happy disposition and a strong desire not to be shaken out of it, "really tied up to any Balkan outbreak—I mean necessarily, of course. Other issues might come in. But I see no reason, my dear Sir Julian, why we should, in this very disagreeable crisis, not remind ourselves—and I am, like you, one of the greatest admirers of the French—that an entente is *not* an alliance. Political sympathy can do a great deal to affect these questions. I can imagine a very strong note—"

"Is an engagement nothing till you've got the ring on?" asked Julian, savagely. "Are you going to let down France, who's not very often, but has just lately, trusted us? If we do, let me tell you this: we shall deserve exactly what we shall get. And make no mistake about it; we shall get it. The channel ports, taken from a vindictive, broken France, used, as they ought to be used, dead against us. A little luck and a dark night, and I wouldn't give *that* for England."

Julian flung his lighted cigarette into the sea; a faint hiss, and the spark beneath them was sucked into darkness. Neither of the two men moved. Julian lit another cigarette, and the cabinet minister gazed down into the lightless sea. After a pause he said in a different voice:

"Look here, Verny, I've been impressed, devilish impressed, by what you've said; but have you considered what kind of force we've got? Picked men, I grant you, but, as you say yourself, when the Germans do come on, they'll come like half a mountain moving. What's the use of sending out a handful of grasshoppers to meet half a mountain?"

Julian laughed.

"Are you a great man on dog-fights?" he asked. "I've seen a bulldog, quite a small chap he was, bring down a Great Dane the size of a calf. The Dane had got a collie by the throat; friend of my little chap's, I fancy. He couldn't get at the Dane's throat, for fear of piling his weight on the collie; so he just stepped forward and took half a leg between his teeth, and buried his head in it. I heard the bone crack. The Dane tried to face it out,—he was a plucky fellow and the size of a house,—but after a bit he felt held down. So he wheeled round and seized the bull by a piece of back (the collie crawled off, he'd had enough, poor brute!), but the bull didn't stir. He went on cracking that bone; he gave the Dane all the back he wanted. Devil a bit *he* turned till the whole leg went like a split match, that hurled the Dane over, and I had to take Chang (that was his name) off, or he'd have finished him up. He'd just begun to enjoy the fight, with half his back chawed over!

"We've got a navy that'll do just that to Germany if we hold on long enough. Don't you forget it. It's pressure that tells against size—pressure on the right spot, and persistent."

The cabinet minister tried to say to himself that countries weren't like dogs; but he was a truthful man, and he thought that on the whole they were.

England rose up suddenly before them out of the darkness. They were coming into Plymouth Sound. The port lights held them steadily for a minute, and the steam yacht bustled soberly toward the docks.

"If your little lot sit down under this," said Julian, straightening his shoulders and holding the other man with his insistent eyes, "by God! I'll cut my throat and say, 'Here died a Briton whose country had lost its soul.'"

"Bit of Irish in him of course," murmured the cabinet minister as Julian swung away from him. "Still, I suppose what I shall say is that on the whole, taking everything into consideration, I think we should be wiser to support France."

CHAPTER VII

Julian had spent thirty-two years—his mother included his first—in seeing what he wanted to do and doing it. He had never consulted anybody else, because he had always seen his way clearly, but he had made from time to time reports to his mother. He had been hostile to his father, who had opposed him weakly and sometimes unfairly till he died. Julian never felt disheartened or found any opposition in himself to what he wanted to do. Opposition in others he liked and overcame. Nothing in him warned him that love demands participation and resents exclusion.

On landing, he hurried to London, and went at once to see an old friend of his in the War Office.

"Look here, Burton," he said, "you remember 1911, don't you?"

Burton drew on the blotting-paper with a pencil; he was almost overwhelmingly cautious. If he had not been, many more serious things than caution would have been overwhelmed.

"I think," he said, "if I remember right, you went abroad."

Julian chuckled.

"I was a German navy for six months," he said. "I ate like a German, I drank thirty bottles of beer at one sitting for a bet, and I lost my head and my temper in German. It seems as if the best thing I can do just now is to repeat the experiment."

"You did it at your own risk," Burton reminded him. "It was certainly serviceable, but we limited our communications with you as much as possible. If it should enter into your mind to do such a thing again, we should of course have no communication with you whatever. Also, you would need German papers—birth certificates, registrations. I really do not know at a time like this what you might not find necessary. The work, if you came back, would be invaluable."

Julian nodded.

"Don't you bother yourself about papers," he said. "I've been in a German consular office, and I've got a German birth-certificate. It's one of the things I do particularly well. As long as they're not suspicious they won't ram the papers home, and I don't propose to let them get suspicious. I shall be Cæsar's wife. Three years of Heidelberg have oiled my throat to it. My mother tells me I often speak English in a hearty German voice. My idea is to go out as soon as possible, through Belgium. They'll strike there, I feel pretty sure, and I'll come back the same way—October to November, if I can. You can put about that I 'm off to the Arctic Ocean. If I'm not back by Christmas, don't expect me. I shall have no communication with any one until my return."

Burton smiled.

"My dear Julian," he said, "one moment. I have not yet congratulated you upon your engagement. I do so with all my heart. But do you intend to tell Miss Young? She may not like the Arctic Ocean or she may expect you to fight. She will also, no doubt, look for some communication from you; and, as you very rightly assert, there can be no communication whatever with anybody until you return."

Julian hunched up his shoulders and whistled.

"She's the pick of women," he said softly. "Leave her to me."

"It's all going to be left to you," said Burton, gravely. "If you live, you'll get no apparent acknowledgment; if you die, no one will ever know how. I do not say this to dissuade you,—there are too many things we want to know,—but when I saw the announcement of your engagement in the paper, I said, 'Well, we've lost him.'"

Julian rose, and walked to the window. Until that moment he had not given Marian a thought. He was full of a lover's images of her, but he had not connected them with what he was going to do. He remembered what Marian's inconspicuous-looking little friend had said to her, "honest as crystal, equable, strong."

Then he turned back to his friend.

"You haven't lost me," he said steadily. "After all, if we're up against anything at all, Burton, we're up against a pretty big thing. I must do exactly what is most useful. Of course I'd rather fight. One likes one's name to go down and all that, and I'd like to please Marian; but the point, both for her and for me, will be the job."

"Ah," said Burton. "Then if you'll just come with me, I'll take you to a fellow who will let you know what we want particularly just now to find out. You're quite right as far as we are concerned; but it's not fair to rush a man into our kind of fight. It's not like any other kind. It's risks without prizes."

"What you get out of a risk," said Julian, with a certain gravity, "is a prize."

Burton looked at him curiously; he rested his hand for a moment on his friend's shoulder.

"That's a jolly good phrase, Julian," he said quietly, "and I think it's true; but it's not necessarily a personal prize. You pay the piper, and he plays the tune; but you mightn't be there to listen to the tune."

"Don't be a croaking, weather-beaten, moth-eaten old Scotch raven!" laughed Julian. "Take my word for it; you get what you want out of life if you put all you've got into it. That's just at this moment what I propose to put."

"And that," said Burton, without returning his smile, "is what we propose to take, Julian."

CHAPTER VIII

Amberley hung upon a cliff of land above the water meadows. Rising high behind it, fold on fold, were the Sussex Downs, without lines, without rigidity, as soft as drifting snow.

The village had been the seat of a tremendous castle,—little of these famous ruins were left,—but the old, yellow stone walls still girdled Amberley in the shape of a broken crown.

There was only one street, a sleepy, winding, white down road, which ran between mossy barns and deep-thatched cottages under the Amberley Wall. The castle was older than Amberley House, yet Amberley House was a respectable three hundred years, and had been all that time the home of countless Vernys. It had not retreated into relentless privacy, as most old English homes have done; it stood, with its wide porch, stoutly upon the moss-grown cobbles.

But it was better than its promises. If it had no park, there lay behind its frontage not a park, but a garden—a garden that fitted in with nature, only to excel it.

Lady Verny loved two things, her garden and her son; but she had been able to do most with her garden. There were terraces that swung from point to point above the long, blue valley; there was a lawn hemmed in by black yew hedges, over which the downs piled themselves, bare and high, with only the clouds beyond them. There was a sunken rose-garden, with rough-tiled pathways leading to a lake with swans. Three hundred years had helped Lady Verny with the lawn, but the herbaceous borders had been her own affair. Julian, crossing the lawn toward her, was the same strange mixture of her hand and time; and she had always known that when she had done all she could for Julian and the garden, she would have to give both up. With all their difficulties, their beauties, and their sullen patches, they would pass into the hands of some young and untried person unchosen by herself.

The person had been chosen now. Marian was already at Amberley for a week-end, and knowing that Julian was expected, she had left Lady Verny sitting by the tea-table under the yew hedge and gone up toward the downs.

Julian would like this; he would not wish his bride to meet him half-way. He would delight in Marian's aloofness; her deliberate and delicate coldness would seem to him like the bloom upon a grape. But the coldness of a future daughter-in-law is not the quality which most endears her to a mother.

"Julian," Lady Verny said to herself as he approached her, "will make a very trying lover. If he is absorbed in Marian, he will interfere with her; and if he is absorbed in anything else, he will ignore her. He needs a great deal of judicious teasing. Marian takes herself too seriously to see the fun of Julian; she only sees the fun of sex. She was quite right to go up to the downs. It'll amuse him to pursue her now, but it'll bore him later; and in the end he'll find out that she doesn't keep him off because she's got so much to give, but because she's so afraid of giving anything."

"Where's Marian?" asked Julian before he kissed her.

"She went up toward the downs," said Lady Verny. "She left no directions behind her. She's a will-o'-the-wisp, my dear."

Julian laughed.

"She knew I'd follow her," he said; "but I'll have my tea first, please."

"She has always been followed, I imagine," said Lady Verny, giving him his tea, "and she has always known it."

Julian looked pleased; this was the kind of wife he wanted, a woman used to admiration, and who never made the fatal mistake of seeking it. He had not much knowledge of women, but he had very strong opinions about them, unshaken by any personal reckoning. One opinion was that nothing too much can be done for a good woman. She must be protected, cared for, and served under every ordeal in life. She must be like a precious jewel; bars, safes, banks, must be constructed to insure her inaccessibility from all the dangers of the open world.

She must be seen—the East receded from him at this point—and admired; but she must be immaculate. That is to say, she must at no time in her career personally handle an experience. She must be a wife and mother (unmarried women, though often presumably virtuous, were only the shabby bankrupts of their sex), but, once married and a mother, she must be kept as far as possible from all the implications of these tremendous facts.

Bad women were unsexed. That is to say, no law applied to them; they were as outcast as a man who cheats at cards. The simile was not exact, as the women were occasionally themselves the cheated; but it was near enough for Julian. There were of course considerably more female outcasts than card-sharpers; but this was fortunate, for inadvertently they protected good women, in a manner in which card-sharpers have not been known to protect good men. But Julian thought men needed no protection, only women who were safe, needed it.

Julian was kinder to women than his opinions promised, because, being strong, he was on the whole gentle toward those who were weak; but his kindness was a personal idiosyncrasy, not a principle.

Lady Verny looked at him a little helplessly. There was something she wanted very much to say to him, but she suffered from the disability of being his mother. There is an unwritten law that mothers should not touch upon vital matters with their sons. Lady Verny believed that Julian was a victim of passion. She did not think he had understood Marian's nature, and she knew that when passion burns itself out, one of two things is left, comradeship or resentment. She had lived with resentment for twenty years, and she knew that it was not an easy thing to live with, and that it would have been worth while had she known more about it earlier, to have found out if

there was comradeship under the passion before the flames of it had burned her boats.

"I wonder," she said consideringly, gazing into the bottom of her tea-cup, "if your lovely Marian has a sense of humor?"

"Humor?" said Julian, taking two savory sandwiches and wrapping them in bread and butter. "What does she want with humor at her age? It's one of the things people fall back on when they've come croppers. Besides, I don't believe in comradeship between the sexes. Infernally dull policy; sort of thing that appeals to a bookworm. What I like is a little friendly scrapping. Honor's easy! I never have cared much for brains in a woman."

He smiled at the woman he knew best in the world, who had brains, and had given him the fruit of them all her life, with kindly tolerance.

Probably she was jealous; but she wouldn't be tiresome if she was, and he would make things as easy for her as possible.

Lady Verny saw that Julian thought that she was jealous. She looked away from him to the terrace where he had fallen as a baby and struck his head against the stone cornice of the sundial.

She could never look at the sun-dial without seeing the whole scene happen again—and the dreadful pause that followed it when the small, limp figure lay without moving. Julian was the only child she had ever had. She shivered in the hot summer air and gave up the subject of human love. There is generally too much to be said about it to make it a good subject of conversation except for lovers, who only want each other.

She pointed to the newspaper that lay between them; that also was serious.

"My dear," she said quietly, "this appears to be a very bad business?"

"Yes," Julian acknowledged. "This time there'll be no ducking; there's nothing to duck under."

"And I dare say," said his mother, without moving the strong, quiet hands that lay on her lap, "you have been thinking what you are going to do in it?"

"Oh, yes, I've decided," said Julian. "I shall be off in ten days. You'll guess where, but no one else must know."

"It was a big risk before, Julian," she said tentatively.

"This time it'll be a bigger one," he answered, meeting her eyes with a flash of his pleased blue ones. "That's all. It'll need a jolly lot of thinking out."

"And you've—and Marian has agreed to it?" Lady Verny asked anxiously.

"I haven't told her yet," said Julian, easily. "It didn't occur to me to mention it to her first any more than to you. I knew you'd both understand. Obviously it was the one thing I could do. She'll see that, of course."

"I'm different," said Lady Verny, with a twist of her ironic mouth. "I'm your mother. A mother takes what is given; a wife expects all there is to give."

Julian looked a little uncomfortable. Burton, who was a man, and might therefore be assumed to know better than a woman what a woman felt, had come to the same conclusion.

Julian was prepared to give everything he had to Marian—Amberley and all his money and himself. There was something in the marriage service that put it very well, but didn't, as far as he remembered, say anything to include plans.

"I hope she likes Amberley?" he ventured.

Lady Verny filled his cup a second time, and answered tranquilly:

"Marian thinks it a charming little place to run down to for week-ends." Then she added very gently: "This is going to be very hard for Marian, Julian. You'll remember that, won't you, when you tell her?"

"Damnably hard," said Julian under his breath. "Of course I'll remember. I wish to Heaven she'd marry me first. By Jove, I'll *make* her!"

Lady Verny's lips closed tightly. She wasn't going to tell Julian anything, because she did not believe in telling things to people who will in the course of time find them out for themselves. She knew that Marian would not marry him at a moment's notice. She knew that he was asking Marian already to stand a very serious burden, and she did not think Marian's was the type of love that cares for very serious and unexpected burdens. She gazed at the bushes of blue anchusa; the gardener had planted pink monthly roses a little too thickly among them. She could alter that; she did not think there was anything else she could alter.

Julian strode toward the downs full of seriousness, eagerness, and pride, and in her heart Lady Verny prayed not that God's will might be done, which seemed to her mind superfluous, but that it might as far as possible be made to square with Julian's. She was a wise and even a just woman, but she thought that Providence might be persuaded to stretch a point or two for Julian.

CHAPTER IX

Julian walked easily and swiftly up the slopes of the downs, whistling as he went. He knew the point from which he would be sure to see his flying nymph. The air was full of the songs of larks; beneath his feet the short grasses and wild thyme sent up a clean and pungent fragrance.

The little, comfortable beauties of the summer's day filled his heart with gladness. There was no sound in all the sleepy country-side; the peaceful shining clouds floated over the low green hills as vague as waking dreams.

The cropping of the sheep upon the downs, the searching, spiral laughter of the larks, were part of the air itself; and the shadows ran an interminable race across the long green meadows.

Julian had had experiences of love before, but he had never been in love as he was now. He compared these earlier efforts in his mind with the light clouds that melted into the sunshine. Marian was the sunshine; she thrilled and warmed his whole being. She was like an adventure to him. He felt very humble in his heart to think the sun had cared to shine upon him, and very strong to meet its shining.

He noticed little things he had never noticed before: the feathery, fine stalks of the harebells, and the blue butterflies that moved among them like traveling flowers. Usually, when he walked, he noticed only the quickest way to reach his goal. He noticed that now, but he tried not to crush the small down flowers on his way.

He caught sight of Marian from a ridge of down, sitting motionless and erect upon the rim of an old chalk-pit. A long, blue veil hung over her shoulders like the wings of a blue butterfly fluttering before him. She saw his shadow before he reached her, and threw her head back with a little gesture that was half a welcome and half a defiance.

He came swiftly across the grass toward her, but it was she who was breathless when he took her in his arms.

"Trying to run away from me, are you?" he asked, smiling down at her. "The world's too small here, and it's mine, you know. You shouldn't have come here if you had wanted to escape me."

"Let me go, Julian," she murmured. "I'm sure there's a shepherd close by. Sit down and be sensible."

"Shepherds be hanged!" said Julian, kissing her. "Do you suppose anybody's ever been more sensible than I feel now? Kissing you is the most sensible thing a man ever did; but don't let anybody else guess it."

He sat down at her feet and looked up into the beautiful, flushed face above him. It was as lovely as a lifted flower; but unlike the flower, it was not very soft. It was even like a slightly sophisticated hothouse flower; but she had the look of race he loved. Her level, penciled brows, small, straight nose, curved lips, and chin like a firm, round apple, were the heritage of generations of handsome lives. Her coloring was only a stain of pink upon a delicate, clear whiteness; but the eyes beneath the low, smooth forehead, were disappointing. They were well-cut hazel eyes, without light in them. They lay in her head a little flat, like the pieces of a broken mirror.

Just now they were at their tenderest. Her whole face, bending over him, cool and sweet as the southwest wind and as provocative as the flying clouds, moved his heart almost unbearably. She was like an English summer day, and he knew now what it would mean to leave her.

"I couldn't bear to stay down there," she explained. "I was frightened, not of you, you absurd person, but of being glad. I'm afraid I don't like big feelings very much. I can't explain exactly, but the papers frightened me. I wanted to see you too much. Yes, sir, you may keep that for a prize to your vanity; and I knew that if there should be war—" She stopped, her lovely lips trembled a little. "I shall have to let you go so soon!" she whispered.



"I'm afraid I don't like big feelings much"

He bowed his head over her hand and kissed it passionately.

"If I could spare you this pain," he said, "I'd take a thousand lives—and lose them to do it!"

"No! no!" she murmured. "Keep one, Julian!"

He lifted his head and looked at her steadily.

"I swear I'll keep it," he said. "I'll keep it, and bring it back to you, cost what it may."

It did not look as if it were going to cost very much, with the light clouds passing overhead, and the soft down grasses under them; and their great citadels of youth and love about them, unmenaced and erect.

"I've a piece of work I've got to do," Julian went on, "and I can't tell you anything about it. It'll take me three months, I fancy. I can fight afterward."

She looked at him with eyes in which astonishment turned almost hostile.

"Not fighting?" she said. "But what do you mean, Julian? If we go in, every one must fight. I know you're not a soldier, but there'll be volunteers. With all your adventures and experiences, they are sure to give you a good post. Everybody knows you. What do you mean—a job you can't tell me about—unless, of course it's something naval?"

Julian turned his face to the wild thyme. He shook his head.

"No, not that," he said. "Can't you trust me, Marian?"

"Trust you!" she said impatiently. "Of course I can trust you, but why be so mysterious? Mightn't I equally say, 'Why don't you trust me?'"

"It's part of my job," said Julian quietly, "not to trust the ground we're on or the larks in the sky or the light of my heart,—that's you, Marian,—and it doesn't happen to be the easiest part of my job."

He waited for her to make it easier for him, but he waited in vain. Marian expected easy things, but she did not expect to have to make things easy. These two expectations seldom go together.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are going to be some kind of spy?" she asked in a tone of frank disgust. "Oh, Julian! I couldn't bear it! It's so—so—un-English!"

Julian chuckled. He ought not to have chuckled. If a man does not like a woman with brains, he must learn not to laugh at their absence. Marian stiffened under his laughter.

"England's got to be awfully un-English in some ways if it wants to win this war," he explained. "But you mustn't even to yourself put a name to what I'm going to be. I'm just on a job that'll take me three months, and I'm afraid, my darling, I can't send you a word. That cuts me all to bits, but you're so brave, so brave, you'll let me go."

He buried his head in the grass; he was not brave enough to bear to see the strain he was putting on her courage. Nor was Marian.

"No, Julian," she said, "you mustn't ask such a thing of me. Not to know where you are, and not to be able to tell any one what you are doing! To let you go out into the dark at a time like this! It's too much to ask of me. Promise me you'll give up all idea of it, and try to get a commission like other people. Surely that's hard enough for me. But I'll bear that; I will never make it difficult for you by a word or a look; I wouldn't hold you back a day! You've not settled anything of course?"

He told her that he had settled everything, and that in two days he must go.

A terrible silence fell between them, a cold silence that was like the pressure of a stone. Neither of them moved or looked at the other. Julian took her hand. She did not withdraw it from him, but she left it in his as unresponsive as a fallen leaf.

"Marian," he whispered, "Marian. Love me a little."

She would not turn her face to him.

"Why do you talk to me of love," she asked bitterly, "when without consulting me you do something which involves your whole life and mine!"

He caught her in his arms and held her close to him, kissing her cold lips till they answered him.

"My darling! my darling!" he whispered, "I love you like this and like this! It's sheer murder to leave you! I feel as if it would break me. But I've got to go. Don't you see, don't you understand? It's work I do well, it's important, just now it's more important than fighting; it's not one man's life that hangs on it, but it's thousands. Believe me, there's no dishonor in it. Love me or you'll break me, Marian! Don't be against me. I couldn't stand it. Say you'll let me go, for if I go and you don't say it, I'll go as a broken man."

She pushed him gently away from her, considering him. She knew her terrible power. She was very angry with him, and she had hurt him as much as she meant to hurt him. She had no intention whatever of breaking him. If he was going to do this kind of work, he must do it well. Perhaps, after all, it was rather important; but important or not, he should have asked her first. She laid her small hand over his big one with a delicate pressure.

"Never settle such a thing again without telling me," she said gravely.

Julian promised quickly that he never would. He saw for the first time that love was not liberty, and for the moment he preferred love. He had not felt deeply enough to know that there is a way in which you may widen liberty and yet keep love.

"I shall let you go," Marian said gently, "and I shall try to bear it as best I can."

At the thought of how difficult it was going to be to bear, not to be able to tell anybody anything, she cried a little. Her face was unconvulsed by her tears. They streamed down her blossom-colored cheeks like drops of pearly dew. Julian thought her tears were softness, and he struck at his chance. Now perhaps she would surrender to his hidden hope.

He pleaded, with her head against his heart, that she would marry him, marry him now—at once. He could arrange it all in twenty-four hours. He presented a thousand impetuous arguments. All his wits and his ardor fought for him against her soft, closed eyes. She was his; she would be his forever. He would go with that great possession in his heart; he would go like a man crowned to meet his future.

She opened her eyes at last and moved away from him. At that instant she would have liked to marry him, she would have liked it very much; but besides the fact that she had no things, there loomed the blank uncertainty of the future. Would she be a wife or a widow, and how should she know which she was? There were more immediate difficulties. Her parents were in Scotland; hurried weddings were always very awkward; you couldn't have bridesmaids or wedding presents; and a few hours' honeymoon, with an indefinite parting ahead of it, would be extremely painful.

Even if a marriage under all these disabilities was legal—wouldn't it be worse than illegal—wouldn't it be rather funny?

Julian was sometimes impossible; he had been nearly overwhelming, but he was quite impossible. He might be a dangerous man to marry in a hurry. She would have to train him first.

"It's out of the question, Julian," she said firmly. "The whole future is too uncertain. I should love to—but I can't do it. It wouldn't be right for me to do it. We must wait till you come back."

Julian returned to his study of the short down grasses. He knew that if she had loved to—she would have done it. He had a moment that was bitter with doubt and pain; then his love rose up and swallowed it. He saw the uncertainty for her.

He wanted her now because he knew that he might never have her. He wanted her with the fierce hunger of a pirate for a prize; but the very sharpness of his desire made him see that it was sheer selfishness to press his point. He overlooked the fact that it would have been perfectly useless. No pressure would have changed Marian. Pressure had done what it could for her already: it had moved her to tears. She dried them now, and suggested that they had stayed on

the downs long enough.

CHAPTER X

It sometimes seemed to Stella as if Chaliapine had brought on the war. Those last long golden summer days were filled with his music, and then suddenly out of them flashed the tents in the park, the processions of soldiers and bands, the grim stir that swept over London like a squall striking the surface of a summer sea.

The town hall did not collapse, but it shook. It was a place where, as a rule, the usual things took place, and even unusual things happened usually; but there were several weeks at the beginning of the war when all day long strange things happened strangely. Offices were changed, the routine of years was swept up like dust into a dust-pan, and a new routine, subject to further waves of change, took its place. Workers voluntarily offered to do work that they were unaccustomed to do. The council hall became a recruiting office. No. 8, the peculiar sanctum of the sanitary inspector, was given up to an army surveyor. Tramps asked the cashier questions. It was like the first act of "Boris Goudonoff." Even food was carried about on trays, and as for proclamations, somebody or other was proclaiming something all day long.

There was no religion and no dancing, but there was the same sense of brooding, implacable fate; it took the place of music, and seemed, without hurry and without pause, to be carrying them all along in a secret rhythm of its own toward an unseen goal.

Mr. Leslie Travers ruled most of the town hall committees, and he required innumerable statistics to be compiled and ready to be launched intimidatingly at the first sign of any opposition to his ruling.

Stella, to whom the work of compiling fell, had very little time to consider the war.

When she got home she usually went to sleep. From time to time she heard Mrs. Waring announcing that there was no such thing as war and Eurydice reciting battle-odes to Belgium.

For the first time in her life Eurydice shared a common cause. She was inclined to believe that England was fighting for liberty. She knew that France was, partly because France was on the other side of the channel and partly because of the French Revolution. The destruction of Louvain settled the question of Belgium. To Eurydice, whatever was destroyed was holy. Later on she became a violent pacifist because Mr. Bolt said that we ourselves were Prussian; but for the moment nobody, not even Mr. Bolt, had traced this evasive parallel.

Professor Waring wrote several letters to the papers, asking what precautions the Belgians were taking about Sanskrit manuscript. He had a feeling that King Albert, though doubtless an estimable young man and useful in the trenches, might, like most kings, have been insufficiently educated to appreciate the importance of Sanskrit. That men should die in large numbers to protect their country was an unfortunate incident frequent in history, but that a Sanskrit manuscript should be destroyed was a national calamity, for the manuscript could never be replaced.

He made an abortive effort to reach Belgium and see about it himself, but at the Foreign Office he was stopped by a young man with a single eyeglass, from whom the professor had demanded a passport. The exact expression used by this ignorant young person was, "I'm awfully sorry, sir, but I'm afraid just at present Sanskrit manuscript will have to rip."

Professor Waring promptly addressed letters of remonstrance and advice to several German professors upon the subject. They were returned to him after three weeks, with a brief intimation that he was not to communicate with the enemy. Professor Waring had considered German professors to be his natural enemies all his life; this had been his chief reason for communicating with them. He was fitted, as few officials in the Foreign Office can ever have been fitted, to point out to the German professors the joints in their armor.

They had a great deal of armor and very few joints, and it discouraged Professor Waring to leave these unpierced spots to the perhaps less-practised hands of neutrals.

But it was not until the destruction of Louvain that he grasped to the full the reaction of his former antagonists. When Professor Waring read a signed letter from some of the German professors agreeing to the destruction of the famous Belgian library he acquiesced in the war. He stood in front of his wife and woke Stella up in order to make his declaration.

"Henrietta, there *is* a war," he announced. "It is useless for you to assert that there is not. Not only *is* there a war, but there should be one; and if I were twenty years younger, though wholly unaccustomed to the noisy mechanisms of physical destruction, I should join in it. As it is, I propose to write a treatise upon the German mind. It is not one of my subjects, and I shall probably have to neglect valuable work in order to undertake it; still, my researches into the rough Stone Age will no doubt greatly assist me. Many just parallels have already occurred to me. I hope that no one in this house will be guilty of so uneducated a frame of mind as to sympathize with the Teutonic iconoclasts even to the extent of asserting, as I believe I heard you assert just now, Henrietta, that none of them exist."

Mrs. Waring murmured gently that she thought an intense hopefulness might refine degraded natures, but the next day she bought wool and began to knit a muffler. She had capitulated to the fact of the war. While she knitted she patiently asserted that there was no life, truth, intelligence, or force in matter; and Stella, when she came home in the evening, picked up the dropped stitches.

It was strange to Stella that her only personal link with the war was a man whom she had seen only once and might never see again. She thought persistently of Julian. She thought of him for Marian's sake, because Marian was half frozen with misery. She thought of him because unconsciously he stood in her mind for England. He was an adventurer, half-god, half-child, who had the habit of winning without the application of fear. She thought of him because he was the only young, good-looking man of her own class with whom she had ever talked.

Marian was afraid that Stella might think she had been unsympathetic to Julian about his mission. She told Stella, with her usual direct honesty, how angry she had been with him.

"I know I was nasty to him," she said. "I can't bear to have any one involve me first and tell me about it afterward."

"Of course you can't," agreed Stella, flaming up with a gust of annoyance more vivid than Marian's own. "How like him! How exactly like him to be so high-handed! Fancy whirling you along behind him as if you were a sack of potatoes! Of course you were annoyed, and I hope you gave him a good sharp quarrel. One only has to look at Julian to see that he ought to be quarreled with at regular intervals in an agreeable way for the rest of his life."

"I don't like quarrels," Marian said slowly. "They don't seem to me to be at all agreeable; but I don't think Julian will act without consulting me again."

Stella looked at Marian curiously. What was this power that Marian had, which moved with every fold of her dress, and stood at guard behind her quiet eyes? How had she made Julian understand without quarreling that he must never repeat his independences? Stella was sure Marian *had* made him understand it. It would be of no use to ask Marian how she had done it, because Marian would only laugh and say: "Nonsense! It was perfectly easy." She probably did not know herself what was the secret of her power; she would merely in every circumstance in life composedly and effectively use it. Was it perhaps that though Julian had involved her actions, he had never involved Marian? Was love a game in which the weakest lover always wins?

"Of course I've never been in love," Stella said slowly, "and I haven't the slightest idea how it's done or what happens to you; but I fancy quarreling might be made very agreeable. Love is so tremendous, isn't it, that there must be room for concealed batteries and cavalry charges; and yet of course you know all the time that you are loving the person more and more outrageously, so that nothing gets wasted or destroyed except the edges you are knocking off for readjustments."

"I don't think I do love Julian outrageously," Marian objected. "I didn't, you see, do what he wanted: he had a mad idea of getting a special license and having a whirlwind wedding, leaving me directly afterward. Of course I couldn't consent to that."

"Couldn't you?" asked Stella, wonderingly. "I don't see that it matters much, you know, when you give that kind of thing to a person you love. If you do love them, I suppose it shows you're willing to marry them, doesn't it? But how, when, or where is like the sound of the dinner-bell. You don't owe your dinner to the dinner-bell; it's simply an arrangement for bringing you to the table. Marriage always seems to me just like that. I should have married Julian in a second if I'd been you; but I should have made him understand that I wasn't a sack of potatoes, if I'd had to box his ears regularly every few minutes for twenty-four hours at a stretch."

"Surely marriage is sacred," said Marian, gravely. Stella's point of view was so odd that Marian thought it rather coarse.

"But it needn't be long," objected Stella; "you can be short and sacred simultaneously. In fact, I think I could be more sacred if I was quick about it; I should only get bored if I was long."

"You have such a funny way of putting things," said Marian, a little impatiently. "Of course I know what you mean, but I don't like being hurried. I love Julian dearly, and I will marry him when there is time for us to do it quietly and properly. Meanwhile it's quite awful not hearing from him. I have never been so miserable in my life."

Stella sat on the floor at Marian's feet with Marian's misery. She entered into it so deeply that after a time Marian felt surprised as well as comforted. She had not thought grief so pictorial. She felt herself placed on a pinnacle and lifted above the ranks of happier lovers. She thought it was her love for Julian that held her there; she did not know that it was Stella's love for her. Stella for a time saw only Marian—Marian frozen in a vast suspense, Marian racked with silences and tortured with imagined dangers. She did not see Julian until Marian had gone, and then suddenly she put her hands to her throat, as if she could not bear the sharp pulsation of fear that assailed her. If all this time they were only fearing half enough and Julian should be dead?

She whispered, "Julian dead!" Then she knew that she was not feeling any more for Marian. She was feeling for herself. Fortunately, she knew this didn't matter. Feeling for oneself was sharp and abominable, but it could be controlled. It did not count; and she could keep this much of Julian—the fear that he might be dead. It would not interfere with Marian or with Julian. Hopes

interfere: but Stella had no personal hopes; she did not even envisage them. She claimed only the freedom of her fears.

CHAPTER XI

It is disconcerting to believe that you are the possessor of one kind of temper—a cold, deadly, on-the-spot temper—which cuts through the insignificant flurries of other people like a knife through butter, and then to find a sloppy explosiveness burst from you unaware.

Mr. Travers had never dreamed that in the town hall itself he could ever be led to lose a thing he had in such entire control as his temper. He did not lose it when the blushing Mr. Belk had the audacity to stop him in mid-career, on his way to his sanctum through No. 7, the outer office of his assistant clerks, though they were, as a body, strictly forbidden to address him while passing to and fro. Mr. Belk was so ill advised as to say:

"If you please, sir, it's four o'clock, and Miss Waring hasn't been out to lunch yet." Mr. Travers merely ran his eye over Mr. Belk as a fishmonger runs his eyes over vulnerable portions of cod laid out for cutting, and brought down his chopper at an expert angle.

"Since when, Mr. Belk," he asked, with weary irony, "has Miss Waring's lunch been on your list of duties?"

Then he passed swiftly into his office and faced Stella, closing the door behind him. Temper shook him as a rough wind shakes an insignificant obstacle. He could not hold it; it was gone. It blew inside out like a deranged umbrella. He glared at Miss Waring. There was nothing in her slight, bent figure, with its heavy, brown hair neatly plaited in a crown about her head, which should have roused any town clerk to sudden fury.

"It's abominable," Mr. Travers exclaimed, bringing his trembling hand down with a bang upon Stella's table, "how women behave!"

Stella said out loud, "One hundred pounds, ten shillings, and sixpence," and then looked up at her employer. She asked very quietly who had vexed him. There might have been a fugitive gleam of laughter at the back of her eyes, but there were shadows under them that made her look too tired for laughter.

"You, of course," he cried. "How are we ever to get through with our work if you won't eat? It's so silly! It's so tiresome! It's so uncalled for! Why are you doing these wretched lists now?"

"Because," said Stella—and now the laughter ran out at him unexpectedly and tripped him up—"the town clerk has a meeting at five o'clock at which these statistics must be at hand to justify him in having his own way!"

"Put them down!" said Mr. Travers savagely. Stella laid down her pen with the ready obedience which can be made so baffling when it proceeds from an unconsenting will. "Now go out and get something to eat," he went on, "while I do the wretched things. And don't let this occur again. If you have too much to do,—and I know the correspondence gets more and more every day,—mention it. We must get some help in."

She was gone before he had finished his sentence—gone with that absurd dimple in the corner of her cheek and the sliding laughter of her eyes.

She had left behind her a curious, restless emptiness, as if the very room itself waited impatiently for her return. It was half an hour before she came back. The town clerk had had to answer three telephone messages and four telegrams. If the outer office had not known that he was there and Miss Waring wasn't, he would have had more interruptions. Nevertheless, the figures had helped Mr. Travers to recover his temper.

He was an expert accountant, and you can take figures upon their face-value. They are not like women; they have no dimples.

Mr. Travers was prepared to be the stern, but just, employer again. He remained seated, and Stella leaned over his shoulder. He had not expected that she would do this.

"What have you had to eat?" he asked. It was not at all what he had intended to say to Stella.

"A cup of tea, two ham sandwiches, and a bun:—such a magnificent spread for seven-pence!" replied Stella, cheerfully. "You've forgotten to put in what the insurance will be—there at the bottom of the page."

Mr. Travers rose to his feet. He was taller than Stella, and he considered that he had a commanding presence. Stella slid back into her seat.

"You ought to have had," said Mr. Travers, with labored quietness, "beefsteak and a glass of port."

"Anybody could tell," said Stella, tranquilly, "that you are an abstemious man, Mr. Travers. Port! Port *and* steak! You mean porter. All real drinkers know that port is sacred. Bottles of it covered

with exquisite cobwebs are kept for choice occasions; they are brought in softly by stately butlers, walking delicately like Agag. It is drunk in companionable splendor, tenderly ministered to by nothing more solid than a walnut, and it follows the courses of the sun. There, you did quite a lot while I was away, and if you don't mind just looking through those landlords' repairing leases on your desk, I dare say I shall have finished this before five."

Mr. Travers opened his mouth, shut it again, and returned to his repairing leases. He was not an employer any more. He was not an icy, mysterious tyrant ruling over a trembling and docile universe: his own secretary had literally told him to run away and play!

But it was in the night watches that the worst truth struck him. He had been furious with Miss Waring for not spending more upon her lunch, he had upbraided her for it, and she had never turned round and said, "Look what I earn!" The opportunity was made to her hand. "How can women secretaries earning a hundred a year eat three-and-sixpenny lunches?" That ought to have been her answer. Why wasn't it? She hadn't been too stupid to see it. She had seen it, and she had instantly, before he had had time to see it himself, covered it up and hidden it under that uncalled-for eulogy on port. It was not fear. She hadn't been afraid to stand up to him (uncalled-for eulogies *were* standing up to him); besides she had previously called him unfair to his face. It was just something that Miss Waring *was*—something that made the color spring into Mr. Traver's face in the dark till his cheeks burned; something that had made Mr. Belk dare his chief's displeasure to get her lunch; something that wasn't business.

"She wouldn't take an advantage, because I'd given it to her," he said to himself. "I thought everybody took an advantage when they had the sense to see it; but she doesn't, though she has plenty of sense. But the world couldn't go on like that."

This brilliant idea reassured Mr. Travers; he stopped blushing. He was relieved to think that the world couldn't go on like Stella; but there was something in him, a faint contradictory something, that made him glad that Stella didn't go on like the world.

He went to sleep with these two points unreconciled.

CHAPTER XII

Stella had always known that it would come; she had spent two months far-seeing it. It had usually taken the form of a telegram falling out of Mrs. Waring's wool, or Eurydice standing upon the steps, Cassandra-like, to greet her with a message from Marian. Marian would come to give her the message, but she wouldn't wait; she would drive swiftly away in a motor, and leave the broken universe behind her. But disasters do not come as we have planned their coming.

It was a dull November day, the streets were full of dying leaves, and at the end of all the cross-roads surrounding the town hall a blue mist hung like a curtain. Marian, in black velvet and furs, with old Spanish ear-rings gleaming from her shell-like ears, stood in disgust upon the steps of the town hall. Her small face was frozen with unexpected pain, but she could still feel annoyed with the porter. She stood in the thronged corridor and asked decisively for Miss Waring.

The porter told her that Miss Waring worked in No. 7, or, at any rate, No. 7 would know where she was working.

Marian stared slightly over the porter's head.

"My good man," she said, "how am I to know where No. 7 is? Go and tell her to come to me. Here is my card."

All the way to No. 7 the porter concocted brilliant retorts to this order. He would tell her he was not a footman and that this wasn't Buckingham Palace. He would say roughly that, if she had eyes in her head, she could find No. 7 for herself. But he was intimidated by Marian's ear-rings. A secret fear that she might turn out to be the lord mayor's daughter drove him to No. 7.

Stella was filing letters when he knocked, and when he saw the card she knew the messenger had come; but she did not forget to say as usual, "Oh, thank you, Humphreys."

She finished filing the letters before she looked for Mr. Travers.

He was coming out of the council chamber at the top of a flight of stairs. She stood there for a moment, holding him with her eyes, her lips parted. She looked like a bird that has been caught in a room and despairs of finding the way out.

Her face was strained and eager, and her sensitive eyebrows were drawn together in a little tortured frown; but she spoke quietly as soon as her breath came back to her.

"Mr. Travers, a friend of mine is in trouble. May I go to her for the afternoon? There is still a great deal to do,—I know I ought not to ask you to let me go,—but Mr. Belk and Miss Flint are so kind that I am sure they would help me. I—I should be very grateful if you could spare me."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Travers, sharply. "I mean, of course, you can go; but I won't have Mr. Belk or Miss Flint near me. I will do the work myself."

"Oh," she cried, aghast at this magnanimous humility on the part of her employer, "please don't! Do let me ask them! I'd so much rather—"

Mr. Travers waved her away. He wanted to do the work himself, and he wanted her to be aghast. He descended the stairs rapidly beside her.

"You may leave immediately, Miss Waring," he said sternly as they reached No. 7; "and I will make my own arrangements about your work."

Stella fled. Again he felt the sense of wings, as if he had opened a window, and a bird had flown past him into liberty.

He did not want her to be grateful, but he thought she might have looked back. She had noticed him only as a barrier unexpectedly fallen. She had not seen how strange it was that a barrier of so stubborn and erect a nature as Mr. Travers should have consented to fall.

If any one else had asked him for an afternoon with a friend in trouble, Mr. Travers knew that he would have said, "Your friends' troubles must take place outside office-hours." But when he had seen Stella's face he had forgotten office-hours.

Marian was sitting on a chair in the corridor. Her expression implied that there was no such thing as a town hall, and that the chair was a mere concession to unnecessary space. She said, as she saw Stella:

"Please be quick about putting your things on. Yes, it's bad news about Julian."

Stella was quick. Marian said no more until they were seated together in the motor; then she gave Stella a letter she had received from Lady Verny. Lady Verny wrote:

My dear Marian: You must prepare yourself for a great distress. Julian is in England, but he is very much injured. I want you to go to him at once. Whenever he is conscious he asks for you. My dear, if he recovers,—and they think that if he has an incentive to live he will live,—he will be partially paralyzed. I know that he will want to free you, and it will be right that you should even now feel free; but till then—for a month—will you give him all you can? All he needs to live? It is a great deal to ask of you, but I think you are good and kind, and that I shall not ask this of you in vain. His life is valuable, and will still be so, for his brain is not affected. Before he relapsed into unconsciousness he was able to give the Government the information he acquired. I think it is not wrong to help him to live; but of course I am his mother, and it is difficult for me to judge. All this is very terrible for you, even the deciding of whether you ought to help him to live or not. If I might suggest anything to you, it would be to talk about it with that friend of yours, Miss Waring.

Come to me when you have seen him. Do not think, whatever your decision is, that I shall not realize what it costs you, or fail to do all in my power to help you to carry it out.

Yours affectionately,
HELEN VERNY.

Stella dropped the letter and looked at Marian. Marian sat erect, and her eyes burned. She was tearless and outraged by sorrow. There are people who take joy as a personal virtue and sorrow as a personal insult, and Marian was one of these people. Happiness had softened and uplifted her; pain struck her down and humiliated her solid sense of pride.

"Why wasn't he killed?" she asked bitterly, meeting Stella's questioning eyes. "I could have borne his being killed. Value! What does Lady Verny mean by value? His career is smashed; his life is to all intents and purposes over. And mine with it! It is very kind of her to say he will release me. I do not need his mother to tell me that. She seems to have overlooked the fact that I have given him my word! Is it likely that I should fail him or that I could consent to be released? I do not need any one to tell me my duty. But I hate life! I *hate* it! I think it all stupid, vile, senseless! Why did I ever meet him? What good has love been to me? A few hours' happiness, and then this martyrdom set like a trap to catch us! And I don't like invalids. I have never seen any one very ill. I sha'n't know what to say to him."

"Oh, yes, you will, when you see him," said Stella; it was all that for a while she could say.

She had always believed that Marian had a deep, but close-locked, nature. Love presumably would be the key.

It was unlocked now. Pain had unlocked it, instead of love, and Stella shivered at the tearless hardness, the sharp, shallow sense of personal privation that occupied Marian's heart. She had not yet thought of Julian.

Stella told herself that Marian's was only the blindness of the unimaginative. The moment Marian saw Julian it would pass, and yield before the direct illumination of the heart. Marian's nature was perhaps one of those that yields very slowly to pain. When she saw Julian she would forget everything else. She would not think of her losses and sacrifices any more, or her duties. Stella felt curiously stung and wasted by Marian's use of the word "duty." Was that all there was for the woman whom Julian loved? Was that all there was for Julian!

But she could deal only with what Marian had; so, when she spoke again, Stella said all she could to comfort Marian. She spoke of Julian's courage; she said no life in Julian could be useless that left his brain free to act. She suggested that he would find a new career for himself, and she pictured his future successes. Beneath her lips and her quick outer mind she thought only of Julian, broken.

They stopped in a large, quiet square, at the door of a private hospital. There was no sound but the half-notes of birds stirring at twilight in the small square garden, and far off the muffled murmur of distant streets.

A nurse opened the door.

"You are Miss Young?" she said to Marian. "Yes, of course, we were expecting you. Sister would like to see you first."

They stood for a moment in a small neat office. The sister rose from an old Dutch bureau, one of the traces of the house's former occupants, and held out her hand to Marian. Her eyes rested with intentness upon the girl's face.

"Sir Julian is almost certain to know you," she said gently, "but you mustn't talk much to him. He has been much weakened by exposure. He lay in a wood for three days without food or water. There is every hope of his partial recovery, Miss Young; but he needs rest and reassurance. We can give him the rest here, but we must look to you to help us to bring back to him the love of life."

Marian stood with her beautiful head raised proudly. She waited for a moment to control her voice; then she asked quietly:

"Is the paralysis likely to be permanent?"

The sister moved a chair toward her, but Marian shook her head.

"It is a state of partial paralysis. He will be able to get about on crutches," the sister replied. "Won't you rest for a few moments before going up to him, Miss Young?"

"No, thank you," said Marian; "I will go up to him at once."

She turned quickly toward the door, and meeting Stella's eyes, she took and held her arm tightly for a moment, and then, loosing it, walked quickly toward the stairs. Stella followed her as if she had no being. She had lost all consciousness of herself. She was a thought that clung to Julian, an unbodied idea fixed upon the cross of Julian's pain. She did not see the staircase up which she passed; she walked through the wood in which Julian had lain three days.

He was in a large, airy room with two other men. Stella did not know which was Julian until he opened his eyes. There was no color in his face, and very little substance. The other men were raised in bed and looked alive, but Julian lay like something made of wax and run into a mold. Only his eyes lived—lived and flickered, and held on to his drifting consciousness.

The nurse guided Marian to his bed, and, drawing a chair forward, placed it close to him. Marian leaned down and kissed his forehead. She had determined to do that, whatever he looked like; and she did it.

His lips moved. She bent down, and a whisper reached her: "I said I'd come back to you, and I have." Then he closed his eyes. He had nothing further to say.

Marian did not cry. After the first moment she did not look at Julian; she looked away from him out of the window. She did not feel that it was Julian who lay there like a broken toy. It was her duty. She had submitted to it; but nothing in her responded to this submission except her iron will.

The nurse had forgotten to bring a chair for Stella. She leaned against the door until a red-haired boy with a bandaged arm, on the bed nearest to her, exclaimed earnestly:

"Do take my chair! You look awfully done."

She was able to take his chair because her hands were less blind than any other part of her, and she smiled at him because she had the habit of smiling when she thanked people. Then her eyes went back to Julian. Her heart had never left him; and she knew now that it never would leave him again.

She did not know how long or short it was before Marian rose gracefully, and said in her clear, sweet voice, "I shall come again to-morrow, Julian."

Marian stopped at each of the other bedsides before she joined Stella. She said little, friendly, inclusive words to the other two men, which made them feel as if they would like to sweep the floor under her feet.

"All the same," the red-haired man explained after the door closed, "it was the untidy little one, piled up against the door, that minded most. I dare say she was his sister."

He had no need to lower his voice, though he did lower it, for fear of its reaching Julian.

Julian had been reassured, and now he was resting. Consciousness had altogether receded from

him, perhaps that it might give him a better chance of resting.

CHAPTER XIII

Julian roused himself with the feeling that he had said only half of what he had intended to say to Marian. It had been in his mind a long time. It was while he was lying out under the pine-trees that he had realized what he had got to say to Marian if he ever got back. There was a complicated cipher message for the Government, which he had kept quite clear in his mind, and eventually given to an intelligent doctor to send off; and there was the message to Marian, which he himself would have to say when he saw her.

"I've come back, as I promised; but I can't marry you now, of course. I'm a crock."

The first time he saw Marian he had got through only the first part of the sentence. There was no hurry about the rest of it. The doctor and the sister had both assured him that there was no hurry. They had been very kind, and quite as honest as their profession permitted. They said Marian would come back, and he could tell her then.

They admitted, when he cross-questioned them with all the sharpness of which he was capable, that he would be a cripple. They did not bother him with futile commiserations. They gave him quietly and kindly the facts he asked for. He would never be able to walk again, but he could get about easily on crutches.

Julian did not want to live very much, but his mother's eyes hurt him when he tried not to; and then Marian came again, and he got through the rest of his sentence.

"You see," he explained in a low whisper which sounded in his head like a gong, "marriage is quite out of the question."

Marian was there with smiles and flowers, just as he had so often pictured her; but she sat down with a curious solidity, and her voice sounded clearer than it had sounded in his dreams.

"Nothing alters our engagement, Julian," she said. "Nothing can."

She spoke with a finality that stopped his thinking. He had finished his sentence, and it seemed hardly fair to be expected to start another on the spur of the moment. He gave himself up to a feeling of intense relief: he had got off his cipher to the Government and he had released Marian.

He had known these were going to be difficult things to do. The cipher had been the worst. The French doctor had taken some time to understand that Julian must neither die nor be attended to until he had sent the cipher off; and now the business about Marian was over, too. He had only to lie there and look at her day by day coming in with roses. They did not talk much. Julian never spoke of his symptoms, but they were too radical to free him. He lay under them like a creature pinned under the wreckage of a railway accident.

Slowly, day by day, his strength came back to him; and as it came back, peace receded. His eyes lost their old adoring indulgence; they seemed to be watching Marian covertly, anxious for some gift that she was withholding from him. He did not demand this as a right, as the old Julian would have done, breaking down the barriers of her pride to reach it. He pleaded for it with shamed eyes that met hers only to glance away. Something in her that was not cruelty as much as a baffling desire to escape him made her refuse to give him what his eyes asked.

Julian had loved her for her elusiveness, and the uncaptured does not yield readily to any appeal from the hunter. The prize is to the strong.

She would not have withstood a spoken wish of his; but there is something in speechless suffering from which light sympathies shrink away. Pity lay in Marian a tepid, quickly roused feeling, blowing neither hot nor cold. She cried easily over sad books, but she had none of the maternal instinct which seizes upon the faintest indication of pain with a combative passion for its alleviation. She became antagonistic when she was personally disturbed by suffering.

She was keeping her word to Julian while her heart was drifting away from him; and he, while he desired her to be free, instinctively tried to hold her back. They had both put their theories before their instincts, and they expected their instincts to stand aside until their theories had been carried out.

Perhaps if Julian could have told her his experiences he might have recaptured her imagination; but when she asked him to tell her about them, he said quickly, "I can't," and turned away his head. He was afraid to trust himself. He wanted to tell her everything. He was afraid that if he began, his reticence would break down, and he would tell her things which must never pass his lips. He longed for her to know that every day, and nearly every hour, he had fought and conquered intricate abnormal obstacles. He had slipped across imminent death as a steady climber grips and passes across the face of a precipice.

He had never faltered. All that he had gone to find he had found, and more. At each step he had seen a fresh opportunity, and taken it. He had been like a bicyclist in heavy traffic assailed on every side by converging vehicles, and yet seeing only the one wavering ribbon of his way out.

And he had won his way out with knowledge that was worth a king's ransom. He could have borne anything if Marian would realize that what he had borne had been worth while. But after her first unanswered question, Marian never referred again to what he had done. She behaved as if his services had been a regrettable mistake.

She talked with real feeling about the sufferings of those who fought in the war. Her eyes seemed to tell him what her lips refrained from uttering, that she could have been more sorry for him if he had been wounded in a trench, and not shot at and abandoned by a nervous sentry firing in the dark. He could not remember the exact moment when out of the vague turmoil of his weakened mind he gripped this cold truth: Marian was not tender.

When she was not there he could pretend. He could make up all the beautiful, loving little things she had not said, and sometimes he would not remember that he had made them up. Those were the best moments of all. He believed then that she had given him what his heart hungered for. He was too much ashamed of his ruined strength to feel resentment at Marian's coldness. It struck him as natural that she should care less for a broken man.

His mind traveled slowly, knocking against the edges of his old dreams.

He thought perhaps a nursing home wasn't the kind of place in which people could really understand one another, all mixed up with screens and medicine bottles, and nurses bringing things in on trays. If he could see Marian once at Amberley for the last time, so that he could keep the picture of her moving about the dark wainscoted rooms, or looking out from the terrace above the water meadows, he would have something precious to remember for the rest of his life; and she mightn't mind him so much there, surrounded by the dignity of the old background of his race. One day he said to her:

"I want to go to Amberley as soon as I can be moved. I want to see it again with you."

"In December?" asked Marian, with lifted, disapproving brows. "It would be horribly damp, my dear Julian, all water-meadows and mist. You would be much more comfortable here."

Julian frowned. He hated the word "comfort" in connection with himself.

"You don't understand," he said, a little impatiently. "I know every inch of it, and it's quite jolly in the winter. We are above the water. I want to see the downs. One gets tired of milk-carts and barrel organs, and the brown tank on the roof across the way. You remember the downs, Marian?"

His eyes met hers again with that new, curiously weak look of his. Marian turned her head away. How could Julian bear to speak of the downs?

She saw for a moment the old Julian springing up the hillside assured and eager, the fine, strong lover who had taken her heart by storm. She spoke coldly to this weaker Julian.

"Yes," she said, "I am not likely to forget the downs. I spent the last happy hours of my life there; but I cannot say I ever wish to see them again."

Julian's eyes fell, so that she could not see if he had even noticed how bitterly she remembered Amberley.

The next day she found him sitting up for the first time. He was propped up by cushions, but it made him look as if he had gained some of his old incisive strength.

The other two men had been moved, and they had the large, bare room to themselves.

No sound came from the square beneath them; in the house itself there were passing footsteps and the occasional persistent buzzing of an electric bell.

"Look here," said Julian in a queer, dry voice, "I've got an awful lot to say to you—d'you mind drawing your chair nearer? I meant to say it at Amberley. I'd have liked it better there. I rather hate this kind of disinfected, sloppy place for talk. You must loathe it, too. But here or there it's got to be said. You said something or other when I first put it to you—about our engagement never being broken. It was awfully good of you, of course. I couldn't see through it at the time. I wanted to let things slide. But it's all nonsense my dear girl. Women like you can't marry logs of wood."



"Women like you can't marry logs of wood"

He looked at her anxiously. Her eyes were shut to expression. She sat there, just as lovely, just as sphinx-like as some old smiling portrait. There was the same unfluctuating, delicate color in her face, and the same unharassed, straightforward glancing of the eyes. She was not the least perturbed by what he said; she expected him to say it.

"We should be foolish," she answered quietly, "to try to ignore the terrible difference in our lives, Julian, and I was sure you would want to set me free; but you cannot do it. I took the risk of your accident, unwillingly at first; but, still, eventually I accepted it, and I will not be set free."

His eyes held hers compellingly, as if he were searching for some inner truth behind her words, and then slowly reluctant tears gathered across the keenness of his vision. He leaned his head back on his pillow and looked away.

"I don't think," he said slowly, "you're glad to have me back. I don't want to marry you, I couldn't marry you; but I wish to Heaven you'd been glad! O Marian, I'm a coward and a fool, but if you'd been glad, I'd have gone down under it! I'd have married you then. I oughtn't to say this. It's all nonsense, and you're quite right. It's awfully fine of you to want to keep your word; but, you see, I didn't want your word. It's your heart I wanted. I used to say out there sometimes, when things were a bit thick, 'Never mind. If I get through, she'll be glad.'"

Marian drew herself up. This did not seem to her fair of Julian. She had prayed very earnestly to God for his safe return. Neither God nor he had been quite fair about it. This was not a safe return.

"I don't know what more I can do, Julian," she said steadily, "than offer to share my life with you."

"That's just it," said Julian, with that curious look in his eyes which kept fighting her, and yet appealing to her simultaneously. "You can't do more. If you could, I'm such a weak hound, I'd lie here and take it. If you wanted me, Marian,—wanted a broken fragment of a man fit for a dust-pan,—I'd land you with it. But, 'pon my word, it's too steep when you don't want it. Out of some curious sense of duty toward the dust-pan—I'm afraid I'm being uncivil to the universe, but I feel a little uncivil to it just now. No; you've got to go. I'm sorry. Don't touch me. Just let me be; but if you could say just where you are before you go! But it doesn't matter. I shouldn't believe it. I wouldn't believe the mother that bore me now. I've seen the end of love."

The tears burned themselves away from his eyes; they gazed at her as sunken and blue as the sea whipped by an east wind. She turned slowly toward the door.

"I want you to remember, Julian," she said, "that I meant what I said. I mean it still. I *wish* to carry out our engagement."

Julian said something in reply that Marian didn't understand. He was repeating out loud and very slowly the cipher he had sent to the Government.

After all, it had been easier to send the cipher to the Government than to release Marian. His mind had sprung back to the easier task.

CHAPTER XIV

It was not often that Stella took anything for herself, least of all Saturday afternoons. They belonged by a kind of sacred right to Eurydice, and what was left over from Eurydice was used on the weekly accounts. Mrs. Waring found it easier to explain to Stella than to any one else why one and sixpence that was really due to the butcher should have been expended upon "The Will of God," bound in white and gold for eighteenpence, an indisputable spiritual bargain, but a poor equivalent to the butcher.

But this Saturday afternoon Stella hardened her heart against Eurydice and turned her mind away from the vista of the weekly bills. She wanted to think about Julian.

Marian had left London the day after her interview with him. She belonged to that class of people which invariably follows a disagreeable event by a change of address; but she had found time before she went to write to Stella. There was something she wanted Stella to send on after her from the Army and Navy stores. She was really too upset and rushed to go there herself. Julian had been so extraordinary; he apparently expected her to be fonder of him now than when he was all right. She had really made tremendous sacrifices going to that horrid nursing home every day for a month. Both her parents were delighted that the engagement was at an end, and of course it was a relief in some ways, though horribly sad and upsetting, especially as Julian behaved as if she were to blame. Marian was afraid he wasn't as chivalrous as she had always thought. She had idealized him. One does when one is in love with people; but it doesn't last. One wakes up and finds everything different.

Stella wanted to forget Marian's letter. It seemed to her as cursory and callous as a newspaper account of a storm in China. It was all so far off, and drowned Chinamen are so much alike; and yet she had written to tell Stella about Julian and the end of love. "Many waters cannot quench love"; it had not taken many waters to quench Marian's. It occurred to Stella for the first time that the quality of love depends solely upon the heart that holds it; not even divine fire can burn on an unintended hearth.

It was a mild December day; winter had given itself a few soft hours in which to brood upon the spring. London, the last of places to feel the touch of nature and the first to profit by it, had passed into a golden mist.

Stella left the town hall at two o'clock, and walked down the busy highway. All the little, lively shops were awake and doing their noisy business of the week, while farther west all the big, quiet shops, with other habits, closed on the heels of their departing customers. Stella slipped away from the eager friendly crowd, glued together in indissoluble groups upon the pavement. She wanted to be alone and not to have to keep reminding herself not to think of Julian until she had finished what she had to do.

She turned down a narrow lane with high brick walls. Silence and solitude were at the turn of a corner. London fell away from her like a jangling dream.

She passed an iron-scrolled gateway which led into an old garden. The low-browed house, with its overhanging eaves, was once the home of a famous poet. Poetry clung about it still; it was in the air, and met her like the touch of a friend's hand. A little farther along the lane she came to an opening in the wall, and saw before her a small, surrounded field of grass. It was a Quaker burial-ground. This unique and quiet people, in their enmity with form, had chosen of all forms the most resilient. They had made in the heart of London a picture, and a place of peace for death.

There was no sense of desolation in the silent field; only the sunshine, the old walls, and the green emptiness. It might have been the grass-grown citadel of Tusculum spread out at Stella's feet, it was a spot so acquainted with the air, with solitude, and with a nameless history.

Beyond it lay a maze of old and narrow streets, with quaint, lop-sided houses, uneven roofs, and winding causeways.

At the end of one of these she came suddenly upon a waste of waters the color of a moonstone. Stella had never been abroad; but she felt as if a wall between her mind and space had broken down and shown her Venice. Drifting slowly down the broad stream were two white swans, and across the river a green bank stood beneath a row of shining towers.

They were a row of factory chimneys; but rising out of the mist, above the moonstone flood, they looked like ancient towers. Stella sat upon a wooden float; it made a luxurious seat for her opposite the drifting swans. She felt as if all her thoughts at last were free. There was no one in sight; old and dignified houses leaned toward the water-front: but for all the life that inhabited them, they might have been the ghosts of houses. Nothing stirred, but sometimes up the river a sea-gull, on level wings, with wary eyes, wandered above the watery highway, challenging the unaccustomed small spaces of the sky.

Stella wished for the first time that Julian were dead. She did not believe in a capricious or an impatient God, moved by well-timed petitions; but all her being absorbed itself into an unconscious prayer for Julian's peace.

She could not have told how long she had been there when she heard the sound of footsteps, strangely familiar footsteps, direct, regular, and swift. She looked up, to meet the grave, intent gaze of Mr. Leslie Travers.

Stella rubbed her eyes as if she had been asleep. Surely in a place of whispering silences, town clerks did not burst upon you except in dreams?

Of course Mr. Travers might live in one of these old, quiet houses, though it did not seem very likely to Stella. She thought he must live in some place where the houses looked as if they knew more what they were about, and did not brood over a deserted waterway

Seeing all their own mischance
With a glassy countenance,

like that immortal gazer, the *Lady of Shalott*.

Mr. Travers did not pass Stella with his usual air of cutting through space like a knife. He crossed the float gingerly, and asked firmly, but with kindness, if he might sit down.

Stella gave a helpless gesture of assent. She could not stop him, but he was inappropriate. The row of factory chimneys ceased to disguise themselves as towers; the float looked as if it knew suddenly how unsuitable it was for a winter afternoon's repose. The swans, approaching fatally near for the ideal, were very nearly black.

"Do you not find it damp here?" asked Mr. Travers.

Stella said:

"Yes, very"; and then, meeting his surprised eyes, she hastily corrected herself. "No, not at all." Then gave a little, helpless laugh. "Forgive me!" she said. "You surprised me so. Has anything gone wrong at the town hall?"

Mr. Travers did not immediately answer her question. He had never sat on a float before. Still, it was not this fact which silenced him. He had not been sure when he approached if Stella was crying or not. There was still something that looked suspiciously like the pathway of a tear upon the cheek next him, and though she was laughing now, it had not the sound of her usual laughter; it stirred in him a sense of tears.

"I think I shall confess at once," he said finally, "that I followed you. I wanted to talk to you without interruption. I might have called upon you at your home, of course, but I have not had the pleasure of meeting your family, and in this instance my business was with you."

Stella gave a faint sigh of relief. She was glad it was business. She was used to business with Mr. Travers. She was not used to pleasure with him, and she was not in the mood for new experiences.

"I shall be glad to talk over anything with you about which I can be of use," she said gently, "and I think this is a beautiful place to do it in."

"The rents," said Mr. Travers, glancing critically at the silent houses, "must be very low, necessarily low. I hope you do not often come here," he added after a pause. "It is the kind of place in which I should strongly suspect drains. We might mention it to the sanitary inspector and ask him for a report upon it."

"Oh, must we?" murmured Stella.

"Not if you would rather not," said Mr. Travers, unexpectedly. "In that case I would waive the question."

Stella glanced at him in alarm. Was Mr. Travers going mad from overstrain at the town hall? He must be very nearly mad to come and sit upon a float with his secretary on Saturday afternoon, and waive a question of drains.

"But that wouldn't be business," she said gravely.

"Yes, it would," said Mr. Travers, relentlessly. "It is my immediate business to please you."

Stella's alarm deepened; but it became solely for Mr. Travers. She did not mind if he was sane or not if only he refrained from saying anything that he would ultimately regret.

"I don't know whether you realize, Miss Waring," Mr. Travers continued, "that I am a very lonely man. I have no contemporary relatives. My father died when I was a young child. I lost my mother two years ago. My work has not entailed many friendships. I began office work very young, and it has to a great extent absorbed me. I think I should be afraid to say it to any one but you,—it would sound laughable,—but my chief attachment of late years has been to a cat."

It was curious that, though Mr. Travers had often been nervous of his secretary's humor, he understood that she would not laugh at him about his cat.

"Oh," she cried, "I hope it loves you as well. They won't sometimes, I know; you can pour devotion out on them, and they won't turn a hair. But when they do, it's so wonderfully reassuring. Dogs will love almost any one, but cats discriminate. I do hope your cat discriminates toward you, Mr. Travers?"

"I think it was attached to me in its way," said Mr. Travers, clearing his throat. "It was an old cat, and now it is dead. I merely mention it in passing."

"Yes, yes," said Stella, quickly. "But I'm so sorry! I hate to think you had to lose what you loved."

"You would," said Mr. Travers. "But the point I wish to make to you is that a man whose sole dependence is upon the attachment of a cat does not know much about human relationships. I fear I am exceedingly ignorant upon this subject. Until lately this had not particularly disturbed me. Now I should wish to have given it more consideration."

"But I think you have," said Stella, eagerly; "I mean I think you've changed lately about relationships. Now I think of it, I'm quite sure you have. I have always enjoyed my work with you, and you have never been inconsiderate to me. But I used to think people weren't very real to you, as if you wanted to hurry through them and stick them on a neat, tight file, like the letters, according to their alphabetical order. But now I know you're not like that. Even if you hadn't told me about the cat I should have known it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Travers. "Thank you very much."

For a while he said nothing at all, and Stella wondered if that was all he wanted. She hoped it was all he wanted. Then he turned and looked down at her.

"I have formed an attachment now, Miss Waring," he said, "and I am in a suitable position to carry it out. You have been the best secretary a man ever had. Could you undertake to become my wife?"

Stella bowed her head. She had come here to think about Julian, but she had not been able to think about him for very long. She did not think about him at all now. She thought only about Mr. Travers. She was so sorry for him that she could not look at him. What compensation was there for what she had not got to give him, and in what mad directions does not pity sometimes drive? For a moment she felt as if she could not say "No" to him; but to say "Yes" would make nothing any easier, for after she had said "Yes" she would have nothing more to give.

There is seldom any disastrous situation in which there is not something that can be saved. Stella saw in a flash what she might still save out of it. She could save Mr. Travers's pride at the cost of hers. She was a very proud and a very reticent woman; she would take the deepest thing in her heart and show it to Mr. Travers that he might not feel ashamed at having shown her his own.

"I can't," she said quickly, slipping her small, firm hand over his; "not because it isn't beautiful of you. It is, of course; it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever known, because you know nothing about me, and I'm so glad I'm not what you would really like if you did know me. Remember that afterward."

"Excuse me," interrupted Mr. Travers, dryly; "I am the best judge of what I like."

"I wonder if you really are," said Stella, with a little gasp, as if she had been running. "I wonder if I really am myself. But we both think we are, don't we? We can't help that—and the very same thing has happened to us both: we've seen and wanted a little—something that wouldn't do—that wouldn't do at all for either of us ever. If you *had* to like somebody that wouldn't do, I think I'm glad you came to me, because, you see, I know what it feels like. I can be sorry and proud and glad you've given it to me, and then we need never talk about it any more."

Mr. Travers looked straight in front of him. Stella had not withdrawn her hand; but Mr. Travers pressed it, and laid it down reverentially between them. He would never forget that he had held it, but to continue to hold it until she had accepted him would have seemed to Mr. Travers a false position.

"There is another point to which I should like to draw your attention," he said after a slight pause. "Marriage does not necessarily imply any feeling of an intense nature by both parties. I wish to offer you security and companionship. As I told you before, I am a lonely man; I could be content with very little. I have noticed that when you come into a room it makes a difference to me."

"Don't make me cry!" said Stella, suddenly, and then she did cry a little, a nervous flurry of tears that shook her for a brief moment and left her laughing at the consternation in his face.

"You see how silly I am!" she said. "But however silly, I'm not a cheat. You offer me everything. I couldn't take it and not offer you everything back. To me marriage means everything. It isn't only—is it?—a perpetual companionship, though when you think of it, that's tremendous,—almost all the other companionships of life are intermittent, but it's the building up of fresh life out of a single love."

Mr. Travers looked away. He was surprised that Stella had not shocked him. The idea of any woman mentioning the existence of a child until she had a child might have shocked him; but Stella failed to move his sense of propriety. It even struck him that marriage would be less inclined to lapse into the sordid and irregular struggles of his experience if it was based upon so plain a foundation. He looked away because he felt that now he could not change her.

Stella wished that they were in a house. It struck her that a room would give more of the advantages of a retreat to Mr. Travers. She was very anxious to make his retreat easy for him.

"Would you do me a tremendous service?" she asked gently.

He turned quickly to face her.

"That is what I should like to do you," he said. But he looked at her a little suspiciously, for he was not sure that the service Stella asked wouldn't, after all, be only some new way of helping him.

"You said the other day," she said, meeting his eyes with unswerving candor, "that I might have extra help if I wanted it. I do want very much to find some work for my sister, Eurydice. She is very clever; cleverer than I am a great deal, only in a different way. She used to write books, but that did not pay her very well, and when the war came, she went into the city and worked for a secretarial diploma. I think she would be of use to you, if you would go slowly with her and make allowances for her different ways of being clever. Would you like to help her?"

Mr. Travers hesitated. Then he stood up and held out his hand to her.

"The sun has begun to go," he said; "I assure you it is not healthy for you to linger here. Of course I will engage your sister."

Stella gave a little sigh of relief. She had found a way out for Mr. Travers.

CHAPTER XV

After the arrival of Eurydice, Mr. Travers saw very little of Stella. At certain moments of the day she came and asked him for orders, but in some mysterious manner she seemed to have withdrawn herself from personal contact. She had been impersonal before, but only in a businesslike and friendly way. She was impersonal now as if she was not there.

She could control her attention, but she no longer felt any vitality behind it. She knew where her life had gone, and she was powerless to call it back to her. It hovered restlessly about the spirit of Julian. Stella had never known what it was to repine at her own fate. If there were many things she wanted that she could not have, she had consoled herself with driving her desires into what was left to her. But she could not do this for Julian.

He had had so much farther to fall. She saw his face as she had seen it first, with its look of human strength; his frosty, blue eyes, his heavy sledge-hammer chin, and all the alertness, the controlled activity, of his young figure. She saw him again like something made of wax, emaciated and helpless, with flickering eyes. He had not believed in knocking under, and he had felt defeat incredible.

But defeat had met him, a blundering defeat that wrecked his body and left his unprotected heart to face disaster.

Would he have courage enough for this restricted battle against adversity? Courage did strange things with pain. It transformed and utilized it; but courage does not spring readily from a mortally wounded pride. Marian, with a complete lack of intention, had robbed Julian of his first weapon. She had dissipated his resources by undermining his confidence, and left him perilously near to the stultification of personal bitterness.

Would it be possible for Julian to escape resentment? Or would he pass down that long lane which has no turning, and ends in the bottomless bog of self-pity, in which the finest qualities of the human spirit sink like a stone?

Step by step Stella passed with him, by all the hidden and vivid obstacles between his soul and victory, between it and defeat.

She could do nothing, but she could not stop her ceaseless watchfulness. She was like some one who strains his eyes forever down an empty road. The days began to lengthen into a long cold spring. There were no outward changes in her life: the drafty town hall, the long bus-rides, the bad news from France, and at home the pinch and ugliness of poverty. She had stopped being afraid that people would notice a difference in her. Nobody noticed any difference. She behaved in the same way and did the same things. She had gone down under the waters of life without so much as a splash.

"I suppose," Stella said to herself, "lots of us see ghosts every day without knowing it." She had a vague feeling that Mr. Travers knew it, but that he kept it in the back of his mind like an important paper in a case, which it was no use producing unless you could act upon it.

It was an awful day of snow and wind. Everybody but Stella and the porter had gone home. She had been stupid over the municipal accounts; over and over again her flagging mind stuck at the same mistake. At last she finished. She was still sixpence out; but she might see the sixpence in a flash the next morning, and there would be no flash in anything she could see to-night.

When she reached the door she found the gale had become formidable and chaotic. She staggered out of the town hall into the grip of a fury. All London shook and quivered; trees were torn down and flung across the road like broken twigs; taxis were blown into lamp-posts; the icy

air tore and raged and screamed as if the elements had set out to match and overwhelm the puny internecine struggles of man. "This," Stella thought to herself, "is like a battle—noise, confusion, senselessness. I must hold on to whatever keeps stillest, and get home in rushes."



"This," Stella thought to herself, "is like a battle"

But nothing kept very still. She was doubtful about trembling lamp-posts, and area-railings twitched and shook under her hands. Her skirts whipped themselves about her like whom panic was overcoming fury, "why not send for her? Lizzie, here are two shillings; go out and see if you can find a taxi."

Stella tried to say what might happen to Lizzie in the search for a taxi, but the effort to speak finished her strength. When she could realize what was happening again, Cicely had arrived. She pounced upon the emergency as a cat upon a mouse.

In a few minutes Stella was tucked up warm and dry, poulticed and eased, capable of a little very short breath, propped up by pillows. The professor had retired to his study with a cup of cocoa hotter than he had known this cheering vegetable to be since Cicely's departure.

Mrs. Waring was breathing very slowly in her bedroom to restore calm to the household, and Eurydice was crying bitterly into the kitchen sink. She was quite sure that Stella was going to die, and that Cicely would save her.

The second of these two calamities took place. Stella was very ill with pleurisy, and remained very ill for several days. Cicely interfered with death as drastically as she interfered with everything else. She dragged Stella reluctantly back into a shaky convalescence.

"Now you're going to get well," she announced to her in a tone of abrupt reproach. "But what I don't understand is the appalling state of weakness you're in. You must have been living under some kind of strain. I don't mean work. Work alone wouldn't have made such a hash of you. Come, you may as well own up. What was it?"

Stella blinked her eyes, and looked round her like a dazzled stranger. Usually she was very fond of her room,—it was a small back room, over a yard full of London cats,—but it struck her now that there were too many things with which she was familiar. It was the same with Cicely. She dearly loved and valued Cicely, but she knew the sight and sound of her extraordinarily well.

"Nothing," said Stella, deprecatingly. "It's no use applying gimlets and tweezers to my moral sense, Cicely. Not even the Inquisition could deal with a hole. Heretics were solid. I have a perfect right to be ill from a cold wind. The world seemed made of it that night, and I swallowed half the world. It must be rather a strain for a thin person to swallow half the world on an empty stomach. I'm quite all right now, thanks to you. I was thinking I ought to get back to the town hall next week. Only, queerly enough, I had another offer of work. Still, it's so sketchy, that I couldn't honestly fling up my own job for it, though it sounds rather attractive."

"Let's see it," said Cicely, succinctly. "You do conceal things, Stella."

Stella withdrew an envelop from under her pillow. She looked a little anxious after its surrender. Cicely always made her a little anxious over a tentative idea. She had a way of materializing a stray thought, and flinging it back upon Stella as an incontrovertible fact. Stella was very anxious not to think that what was in the letter she gave to Cicely was really a fact. It was like some strange dream that hasn't any right to come true. Cicely read:

Dear Miss Waring: You will think this a most extraordinary request for me to make, and in many ways it is too unformulated to be a request. You will have heard from Marian that six months ago her engagement with my son came to an end. This was the natural and right thing to happen, but it has left him in his invalid condition very much without resources.

You were, I remember your telling me, a secretary to Professor Paulson. I am inclined to think that my son might have his mind directed to some scientific work if he could meet any one who would interest him anew in the subject. Probably you are immersed in other work, but if by any possible chance you should be at liberty and cared to make the experiment, could you come here for a few weeks? You would be conferring a great favor upon us, and if the secretaryship developed out of your little visit, we would arrange any terms that suited you. I may add that I find my son has no remembrance of your association with Marian; indeed, he has forgotten the occasion of your meeting.

He has been so very ill that you will understand and excuse this, I feel sure; and in the circumstances I think we had better not refer to it. I am very anxious to divert his mind from the past, and I have a feeling that if I could count upon your cooperation, we might succeed.

Yours sincerely,
HELEN VERNY.

"I don't see anything sketchy about it," said Cicely, slowly; "in the circumstances, I mean. You needn't definitely chuck the town hall. You'll get a couple of weeks' holiday. They'll give you a fortnight's extension easily, and if the job comes your way, it would be a suitable one. Anyway, you must of course accept it provisionally—"

"I don't see why I must of course accept it," said Stella. "You never see any alternatives, Cicely. Your mind is like one of those sign-posts that have only one name on it, with fields all round and heaps of other places to go to. It must be awfully confusing to be as simple as you are. Why couldn't I go back to the town hall next week?"

"Well, I'll tell you one reason why," said Cicely, grimly. "Simple or not, your heart's as weak as a toy watch; you very nearly died a week ago, and in my opinion if you went back to the town hall, you'd be signing your own death-certificate."

"I couldn't do that," said Stella, gravely; "it's not legal. I'm not the next of kin to myself. I know much more about death-certificates than you do. If I go to Lady Verny at Amberley, what's to become of Eurydice?"

"Eurydice will stay where she is," said Cicely. "If you ever saw to the end of your nose, you'd know that she is as glued to the town hall as she used to be to 'Shocks,' only this time, let us hope, more successfully. Some women have to be married. They contract a fatal desire for it, like the influenza habit every winter. Eurydice is one of them. It takes different forms, of course. This time it's Mr. Travers; the Mr. Bolt attachment was far more dangerous. I have made up my mind that she will marry Mr. Travers, if it's humanly speaking possible."

"Oh," said Stella, "will she? How clever you are, Cicely! You know nearly everything. Why do you say 'humanly speaking possible?'"

"Because you've always made him out as cold as a fish and as hard as iron," said Cicely. "He may be one of the few men who won't yield to vanity or fancy."

"I see," said Stella. "It's not very nice of you to want Eurydice to marry an iron fish. But, as a matter of fact, I'm not quite so certain about Mr. Travers. The iron and the fish are only on the top. I think, humanly speaking, he's quite possible. I'm going to sleep now. When you've made up your mind about Amberley you can wake me up."

CHAPTER XVI

There are two winds in March; one comes in like a tight-lipped school-master set on punishment. It is frequently accompanied by dust, sunshine, and influenza. It has all the cold of winter, and acts as if life could be produced solely by formidable harshness.

But there is another wind, a mild, sensitive wind which carries the secrets of the spring—a wind that wanders and sings on sunless days, penetrating the hard crust of the earth as softly and as inveterately as love, a wind that opens while its forceful brother shuts.

It was this wind, calling along the railway lines against the swinging train, that brought Stella to Amberley. It lifted her out of her carriage to the small, wayside station, embracing her with its welcome under shaking trees. The air was full of the earth scents of growing fields. The sky was wide and very near and without strangeness.

A porter, lurching out of the surrounding darkness, told Stella there was a car from Amberley House waiting for her. It could only be for her, because no one else was on the platform.

The station-master himself put her into it. She sank into soft cushions, and shut her eyes to feel the soundless speed. Stella had been on rare occasions in a taxi; but this creature that leaped without friction forward into the darkness, flinging a long road behind it with the ease with which an orange is peeled, was a wholly new experience. When she opened her eyes again they became gradually accustomed to the flying darkness, which was not wholly dark; trees loomed up mysteriously out of it, and the tender shapes of little hills as soft and vague as clouds.

Stella was sorry when the car stopped; she could not see the doorway of Amberley House, hidden under a mass of ivy. It opened suddenly before her into a dusky hall lighted by tall candles in silver candle-sticks.

The hall was full of shadows. There was a fragrance in it of old roses and lavender, and it was quiet. It was so quiet that Stella held her breath. She felt as if for centuries it had been still, and as if no one who had ever lived there had made a noise in it. She was afraid of the sound of her own voice.

At the farther end of the hall there was a glow of firelight on old oak panels. A door opened, and Lady Verny came toward her, very tall and stately, but with the same kind, steady eyes.

Lady Verny came all the way across the long, shadowy room to meet Stella, and held out both her hands; but when she came near, Stella saw that only her eyes were the same. Her face was incredibly older. The firm lines were blurred, the delicate color was gone. The woman who looked down at her was at the mercy of the years. Grief had forced her prematurely out of her comfortable upward path. Even her smile had changed; it carried no serenity.

"I am very glad you have come," Lady Verny said gently. "We will have tea in my room, I think, and then you must rest. I can see you have been ill."

She led the way into a room that seemed curiously like her. It was spacious and convenient, with very few small objects in it. Even the pictures on the walls had the same quality: they were very definite, clear-colored French landscapes, graceful and reticent.

The china, on a low table by the fire, was old and valuable; but it was used every day. Lady Verny had no special occasions, and nothing that she possessed was ever too priceless or too important for use.

"I hope you did not have a very tiresome journey," she continued. "I do not like a change on so short a run, but we have not been able to arrange to have a train straight through from town. Julian was thinking of doing something about it some time ago, but the matter has dropped."

Stella noticed that as Lady Verny spoke of Julian her voice hurried a little. It did not shake; but it passed over his name quickly as if she were afraid that it might shake.

"Since his illness he has taken less interest in local matters," she finished tranquilly.

Stella did not dare to ask if Julian was better. She did not like to speak about his interests; it seemed to her as if almost anything would be better than to say something stupid to Lady Verny about Julian.

"It was a lovely journey," she said quickly, "and I would have hated not to change at Horsham. I was so sorry it was nearly dark. Shelley lived there once, didn't he? I wanted to go and look for the pond where he had sailed five-pound notes because he hadn't anything else to make boats with. Amberley came much too soon; and I couldn't see anything but a bundle of dark clouds. I could only feel it, awfully friendly and kind, blowing across the fields!"

"Yes," said Lady Verny, consideringly, giving Stella her tea; "I think it is a kind little place. There is nothing dreadful about it, not even an ugly chapel, or one of those quite terrible little artist's houses,—you know the type I mean,—as uncomfortable as a three-cornered chair. The kind that clever people live in and call cottages. They've quite spoiled the country round Pulborough; but mercifully the station is inconvenient here, and a good deal of the land is Julian's. I hope you will like it,"—she met Stella's eyes with a long, questioning look,—"because I hope you will stay here for a long time."

"As long as you want me to stay," said Stella, firmly.

"We must not spoil your other opportunities for work," said Lady Verny; "that would be most unfair. I must confess to you, Miss Waring, that I am leaving the whole question very much in the air. It would be more satisfactory to have the arrangement come direct from Julian. If, as I hope, by your presence the old interest and the old questions come back to him, he will ask you to stay himself. For the present I have simply told him that you are my friend and that you have given up your secretarial work to come here for a much-needed holiday; but we must not waste your time or do anything against your interests. I could not allow that."

"It won't take very long, I expect," Stella answered, "because he would take a dislike so quickly. And if he did that, it wouldn't do, of course. We should see in a week or two. If he *doesn't* dislike me; I can easily talk to him about Professor Paulson. I remember they had an argument once—about reindeer-moss. Your son said he had discovered it where Professor Paulson had said it didn't exist. I could bring that up quite comfortably. The mere mention of a fellow-laborer's effort stings a man into the wish to prove something or other about it; and once you start proving, secretaries follow."

"Make them follow," said Lady Verny, smiling. "I don't think he will dislike you,—we usually dislike the same people,—only Julian always goes further than I do; he dislikes them more." Then her smile faded. "You will see him to-night at dinner," she said gravely. She could not smile again after she had said that; but she took Stella herself through the dark oak hall and up the broad, winding staircase to a little, old, square room that looked out over the garden to the flooded water-meadows.

"I don't know if you like gardens," Lady Verny said a little shyly. "It's rather a hobby of mine. You'll see it to-morrow."

"I like even my own," said Stella, "though it only holds one plane-tree and ten cats. At least it doesn't really *hold* the cats. They spill in and out of it in showers like the soot, only more noisily; and I pretend there's a lilac-bush in the corner."

Lady Verny stood by the door for a moment as if she were making up her mind for an immense advance, an almost dazzling plunge into confidence.

"I have a feeling," she said slowly, "as if you would make a *good* gardener."

After she had gone, Stella opened the window, and leaned out into the garden. She could see nothing but the soft darkness, sometimes massed in the thickness of the yew-hedges, and sometimes tenuous and spread out over the empty spaces of the lawns.

The air blew fresh upon her face, full of sweetness and the promise of life. Stella told herself bitterly that nature was cruel; it let strong young things die, and if that didn't matter (and she sometimes thought dying didn't), nature did worse: it maimed and held youth down. But nothing in her responded to the thought that nature was cruel. A tiny crescent moon shone out between the hurrying clouds, and cast a slim shadow of silver across the dark waters. "Things are cruel," Stella said to herself, "but what is behind them is not cruel, and it must come through. And I'm little and stupid and shy; but some of it is in me for Julian, and he'll have to have it. I shan't know how to give it to him. I shall make hideous blunders and muddles, and the more I want to give, the harder it'll be to do it. Fortunately, it does not depend on me. I can be as stupid as I like if I'm only thinking of him and only caring for him and only wanting it to come through me. Nothing can stop it but minding because I'm stupid. And as for being in love, the more I'm in it the better. For that's what we're all in really, only we're none of us in it enough. As long as I'm not in it for anything I can get out of it, everything will be all right. If I do mind, it doesn't matter if only what I want gets through to Julian."

She lay down on the bed and listened to the wind in the garden playing among the tree-tops. She listened for a long time, until she thought that the garden was upon her side, and then she heard another sound. She knew in a moment what it was; it struck straight against her heart: it was the *tap-tap* along the passage of wooden crutches.

CHAPTER XVII

Lady Verny and Julian were sitting in the hall when Stella joined them. It wasn't in the least terrible meeting Julian; he had reduced his physical disabilities to the minimum of trouble for other people. He swung himself about on his crutches with an extraordinary ease, and he had taught himself to deal with his straitened powers so that he needed very little assistance; he had even controlled himself sufficiently to bear without apparent dislike the occasional help that he was forced to accept.

It was the Vernys' religion that one shouldn't make a fuss over anything larger than a broken boot-lace. Temper could be let loose over the trivial, but it must be kept if there was any grave cause for it.

Julian wished to disembarass the casual eye of pity, partly because it was a nuisance to make people feel uncomfortable, and partly because it infuriated him to be the cause of compassion. Lady Verny had not pointed this out to Stella; she had left her to draw her own inferences from her own instincts. Lady Verny did not believe in either warnings or corrections after the days of infancy were passed.

She smiled across at Stella and said quietly:

"My son—Miss Waring."

Stella was for an instant aware of Julian's eyes dealing sharply and defensively with hers. He wanted to see if she was going to be such a fool as to pity him. She wasn't such a fool. Without a

protest she let him swing himself heavily to his feet before he held out his hand to her. Her eyes met his without shrinking and without emphasis. She knew she must look rather wooden and stupid, but anything was better than looking too intelligent or too kind.

She realized that she hadn't made any mistake from the fact that Lady Verny laid down her embroidery. She would have continued it steadily if anything had gone wrong.

There was no recognition in Julian's eyes except the recognition that his mother's new friend looked as if she wasn't going to be a bother. Stella hadn't mattered when he met her before, and she didn't matter now. She had the satisfaction of knowing that she owed his oblivion of her to her own insignificance.

"I'm sure it's awfully good of you," Julian said, "to come down here and enliven my mother when we've nothing to offer you but some uncommonly bad weather."

"I find we have one thing," Lady Verny interposed. "Miss Waring is interested in Horsham. You must motor her over there. She wants to see Shelley's pond."

"Do you?" asked Julian. "I'll take you with pleasure, but I must admit that I think Shelley was an uncommonly poor specimen; never been able to stand all that shrill, woolly prettiness of his. It sets my teeth on edge. I don't think much of a man, either, who breaks laws, and then wants his conduct to be swallowed like an angel's. Have you ever watched a dog that's funk'd a scrap kick up the earth all round him and bark himself into thinking he's no end of a fine fellow in spite of it?"

"I don't believe you've read Shelley," cried Stella, stammering with eagerness. "I mean properly. You've only skimmed the fanciest bits. And he never saw the sense of laws. They weren't his own; he didn't break *them*. The laws he broke were only the dreadful, muddled notions of respectable people who didn't want to be inconvenienced by facts. I dare say it did make him a little shrill and frightened flying in the face of the whole world. However stupid a face it has, it's a massive one; but he didn't, for all the fright and the defiance, funk his fight."

"Let us settle Shelley at the dinner-table," said Lady Verny, drawing Stella's arm into hers and leaving Julian to follow. "Personally I do not agree with either of you. I do not think Shelley was a coward, and I do not think that as a man he was admirable. He has always seemed to me apart from his species, like his own skylark; 'Bird *thou* never wert.' He was an 'unpremeditated art,' a 'clear, keen joyance,' anything you like; but he hadn't the rudiments of a man in him. He was neither tough nor tender, and he never looked a fact in the face."

"There are plenty of people to look at facts," objected Stella, "Surely we can spare one to live in clouds and light and give us, in return for a few immunities, their elemental spirit."

"People shouldn't expect to be given immunities," said Julian. "They should take 'em if they want 'em, and then be ready to pay for 'em; nobody is forced to run with the crowd. What I object to is their taking to their heels in the opposite direction, and then complaining of loneliness. Besides, start giving people immunities, and see what it leads to—a dozen Shelleys without poems and God knows how many Harriets. What you want in a poet is a man who has something to say and sticks to the path while he's saying it."

"Oh, you might be talking about bishops!" cried Stella, indignantly. "How far would you have gone yourself on your Arctic explorations if you'd stuck to paths? Why should a poet run on a given line, like an electric tram-car?"

"I think Miss Waring has rather got the better of you, Julian," said Lady Verny, smiling. "You chose an unfortunate metaphor."

"Not a bit of it," said Julian, with a gleam of amusement. "I chose a jolly good one, and she's improved it. You can go some distance with a decent poet, but you can't with your man, Miss Waring. He twiddles up into the sky before you've got your foot on the step."

"That's a direct challenge," said Lady Verny. "I think after dinner we must produce something of Shelley's in contradiction. Can you think of anything solid enough to bear Julian?"

"Yes," said Stella. "All the way here in the train I was thinking of one of Shelley's poems. Have you read it—"The Ode to the West Wind"?"

"No," said Julian, smiling at her; "but it doesn't sound at all substantial. You started your argument on a cloud, and you finish off with wind. The Lord has delivered you into my hand."

"Not yet, Julian," said Lady Verny. "Wait till you've heard the poem."

It did not seem in the least surprising to Stella to find herself, half an hour later, sitting in a patch of candle-light, on a high-backed oak chair, saying aloud without effort or self-consciousness Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind."

Neither Lady Verny nor Julian ever made a guest feel strange. There was in them both an innate courtesy, which was there to protect the feelings of others. They did not seem to be protecting Stella. They left her alone, but in the act of doing so they set her free from criticism. Lady Verny took up her embroidery, and Julian, sitting in the shadow of an old oak settle, contentedly smoked a cigarette. He did not appear to be watching Stella, but neither her movements nor her expressions escaped him. She was quite different from any one he had seen before. She wore a

curious little black dress, too high to be smart, but low enough to set in relief her white, slim throat. She carried her head badly, so that it was difficult to see at first the beauty of the lines from brow to chin. She had a curious, irregular face, like one of the more playful and less attentive angels in a group round a Botticelli Madonna. She had no color, and all the life of her face was concentrated in her gray, far-seeing eyes. Julian had never seen a pair of eyes in any face so alert and fiery. They were without hardness, and the fire in them melted easily into laughter. But they changed with the tones of her voice, with the rapid words she said, so that to watch them was almost to know before she spoke what her swift spirit meant. Her voice was unfettered music, low, with quick changes of tone and intonation.



Her voice was unfettered music

Stella was absorbed in her desire to give Julian a sense of Shelley. She wanted to make him see that beyond the world of fact, the ruthless, hampering world of which he was a victim, there was another, finer kingdom where no disabilities existed except those that a free spirit set upon itself.

She was frightened of the sound of her own voice; but after the first verse, the thought and the wild music steadied her. She lost the sense of herself, and even the flickering firelight faded; she felt out once more in the warm, swinging wind, with its call through the senses to the soul. The first two parts of the poem, with their sustained and tremendous imagery, said themselves without effort or restraint. It was while she was in the halcyon third portion of

"The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,"

that it shot through Stella's mind how near she was to the tragic unfolding of a fettered spirit which might be the expression of Julian's own. She dared not stop; the color rushed over her face. By an enormous effort she kept her voice steady and flung into it all the unconsciousness she could muster. He should not dream she thought of him; and yet as she said:

"Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bowed
One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud."

it seemed to her that she was the voice of his inner soul stating his bitter secret to the world. A pulse beat in her throat and struggled with her breath, her knees shook under her; but the music of her low, grave voice went on unflinching:

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is.
What if my leaves are falling, like its own!"

Lady Verny laid down her embroidery. Julian had not moved. There was no sound left in the

world but Stella's voice.

She moved slowly toward the unconquerable end,

"Oh, Wind,
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

All the force of her heart throbbed through Shelley's words. They were only words, but they had the universe behind them. Nobody spoke when she had finished.

She herself was the first to move. She gave a quick, impatient sigh, and threw out her hands with a little gesture of despair.

"I can't give it to you," she said, "but it's *there*. Read it for yourself! It's worth breaking laws for; I think it's worth being broken for."

Julian answered her. He spoke carefully and a little stiffly.

"I don't think I agree with you," he said. "Nothing is worth being broken for."

Stella bowed her head. She was aware of an absolute and appalling sense of exhaustion and of an inner failure more terrible than any physical collapse.

It was as if Julian had pushed aside her soul.

"Still, I think you must admit, Julian," Lady Verny said quietly, "that 'The Ode to the West Wind' is an admirable poem. I'm afraid, my dear, you have tired yourself in saying it for us. I know the poem very well, but I have never either understood or enjoyed it so much before. Do you not think you had better go to bed? Julian will excuse us. I find I am a little tired myself."

Stella rose to her feet uncertainly. She was afraid that Julian would get up again and light their candles; but for a moment he did not move. He was looking at her reconsideringly, as if something in his mind was recognizing something in hers; then he dragged himself up, as she had feared he would, and punctiliously lighted their candles.

"It's rather absurd not having electric light here, isn't it?" he observed, handing Stella her candle. "But we can't make up our minds to it. We like candle-light with old oak. I'm not prepared to give in about your fellow Shelley; but I confess I like that poem better than the others I have read. You must put me up to some more another time."

If she had made one of her frightful blunders, he wasn't going to let her see it. His smile was perfectly kind, perfectly impenetrable. She felt as if he were treating her like an intrusive child. Lady Verny said nothing more about the poem; but as she paused outside Stella's door she leaned over her and very lightly kissed her cheek.

It was as if she said: "Yes, I know you made a mistake; but go on making them. I can't. I'm too like him; so that the only thing for me to do is to leave him alone. But perhaps one day one of your mistakes may reach him; and if they can't, nothing can."

Stella shivered as she stood alone before the firelight. Everything in the room was beautiful, the chintz covers, the thick, warm carpet, the gleam of the heavy silver candle-sticks. The furniture was not chosen because it had been suitable. It was suitable because it had been chosen long ago. It had grown like its surroundings into a complete harmony, and all this beauty, all this warm, old, shining polish of inanimate objects and generations of good manners, covered an ache like a hollow tooth. Nobody could get down to what was wrong because they were too well bred; and was it very likely that they were going to let Stella? She would annoy Julian, she had probably annoyed him to-night; but would she ever reach him? In her mind she had been able to think of him as near her; but now that she was in the same house, she felt as if she were on the other side of unbridged space. He was frightening, too; he was so much handsomer than she remembered, and so much more alive. It was inconceivable that he should ever want to work with her.

She sat down before an oval silver mirror and looked at her face. It seemed to her that she was confronted by an empty little slab without light. She gave it a wintry smile before she turned away from it.

"I don't suppose he'll ever want anything of you," she said to herself, "except to go away."

CHAPTER XVIII

Later Stella wrote:

Eurydice dearest:

It's the strangest household, or else, perhaps, everybody else's is. You never see anybody doing anything, and yet everything gets done. It's all ease and velvet and bells; and yet in spite of nothing being a minute late, you never notice the slightest hurry. It isn't clockwork; it's more like the stars in their courses. I always thought being properly

waited on made people helpless; it would me in ten minutes. I can see myself sinking into a cream-fed cushion, but the Vernys sit bolt upright, and no servant they possess can do any given thing as well for them as they can do it for themselves.

I have breakfast in my room, with a robin, and the window open—oh, open on to the sharpest paradise!

While I lie in bed I can see an old, moss-covered barn which always manages to have a piece of pink sky behind it and a black elm bough in front. It's a wonderful barn, as old as any hill, and with all the colors of the rainbow subservient to it. That's one window; the other two look over the garden.

There's a terrace, and a lawn out of which little glens and valleys wander down the hillside into the water-meadows, and there's a lake drowned out by the water, with swans more or less kept in it by a hedge of willows.

The water-meadows are more beautiful than all the little shiny clouds that race across the valley. Sometimes they're like a silver tray, with green islands and wet brown trees on them; and sometimes they are a traveling mist; and then the sun slants out (I haven't seen it full yet), and everything's blue—the frailest, pearliest blue.

Yesterday was quite empty, with only its own light, and when evening came the water-meadows and the little hills were lost in amethyst.

I haven't said anything about the downs. I can't. We walk on them in the afternoon. At least we walk along the lane that goes through the village (it's full of mud; but one gets quite fond of mud), and then when you feel the short turf under you, and the fields drop down, you go up into the sky and float.

One begins so well, too. At breakfast there's such beautiful china, butter in a lordly dish, always honey, and often mushrooms. Everything tastes as if it came fresh out of the sky.

I can do exactly as I like all day. Nobody's plans conflict with any one else's. That's partly being rich and partly being sensible; it's quite wonderful how easy life is if you're both. There's a special room given to me, with a piano and books; and if I want Lady Verny, I can find her in the garden.

I can see her out of my window now; she's wearing a garment that's a cross between a bathing-dress and a dressing-gown, enormous gauntlets, and one of Sir Julian's old caps. There *are* gardeners, especially one called Potter. (Whenever anything goes wrong Lady Verny shakes her head and says, "Ah, that's the Potter's thumb!") But you never see them. She's always doing something in the garden. Half the time I can't discover what; but she just smiles at me and says, "Nature's so untidy," or, "The men need looking after." Both Lady Verny and Sir Julian are very serious over their servants. In a way they're incredibly nice to them, they seem to have them so much on their minds. They're always discussing their relatives or their sore throats, and they give very polite, plain orders; but then just when you're thinking how heavenly it must be to work for them, they say something that chills you to the bone. One of the housemaids broke a china bowl yesterday, and came to Lady Verny, saying:

"If you please, m' Lady, I didn't mean to do it."

"I should hope not," Lady Verny said in a voice like marble. "If you had *meant* to do it, I should hardly keep you in the house; but your not having criminal tendencies is not an excuse for culpable carelessness."

Sir Julian's worse because his eyes are harder; he must have caught them from one of his icebergs. But the servants stay with them forever, and when one of the grooms had pneumonia in the winter, Sir Julian sat up with him for three nights because the man was afraid of dying, and it quieted him to have his master in the room.

I'm beginning to work in the garden myself, the smells are so nice, and the dogs like it. Lady Verny has a spaniel and two fox-terriers, and Sir Julian a very fierce, unpleasant Arctic monster, with a blunt nose like a Chow, and eyes red with temper and a thirst for blood.

He's always locked up when he isn't with Sir Julian. If he wasn't, I'm sure he'd take the other three dogs as hors-d'œuvre, and follow them up with the gardeners.

I don't know what he does all day. Sir Julian I mean; the Arctic dog growls. They never turn up till tea-time; then they disappear again, and come back at dinner. At least Sir Julian does. The Arctic dog (his name is Ostrog) is not allowed at meals, because he thinks everything in the room ought to be killed first.

After dinner I play chess with Sir Julian. He's been quite different to me since he found I could; before he seemed to think I was something convenient for his mother, like a pocket-handkerchief. He was ready to pick me up and give me back to her if I fell about, but I didn't have a life of my own.

Now he often speaks to me as if I were really there. They're both immensely kind and

good to everybody in the neighborhood, but they see as little of people as possible.

They're not a bit religious, though they always go to church, and Lady Verny reads Montaigne—beautifully bound, like Sir Thomas à Kempis—during the sermon. A great deal of the land belongs to them, and I suppose they could use a lot of influence if they chose. I always dislike people having power over other human beings; but the Vernys never use it to their own advantage. In nine cases out of ten they don't use it at all. I heard the vicar imploring Sir Julian to turn a drunken tenant out of a cottage, as his example was bad for the village. But Sir Julian wouldn't even agree to speak to him. "I always believe in letting people go to the devil in their own way," he said. "If you try to stop 'em, they only go to him in yours. Of course I don't mean you, Parson. It's your profession to give people a lead. But I couldn't speak about his morals to a man who owed me three years' rent."

I expect I shall have to come back next week to the town hall. Thank Mr. Travers so much for saying I may stay on longer, but I really couldn't go on taking my salary when I'm bursting with health and doing nothing. I'll wait two more days before writing to him, but I must confess I'd rather have all my teeth extracted than mention Professor Paulson to Sir Julian.

I haven't seen the slightest desire for work in him; but, then, I haven't seen any desire in him at all except a suicidal fancy for driving a dangerous mare in a high dog-cart. He never speaks of himself or of the war, and he is about as personal as a mahogany sideboard.

Lady Verny isn't much easier to know, though she seems to like talking to me. I asked her to call me Stella the other day, and she put down her trowel and looked at me, as if she thought it wasn't my place to make such a suggestion; then she said, "Well, perhaps I will." I wish we'd been taught whose place things are; it would be so much simpler when you are with people who have places. But Lady Verny doesn't dislike me, because I've seen her with people she dislikes. She's much more polite then, and never goes on with anything. Last night when I was playing chess with Sir Julian (it was an awful fight, for he's rather better than I am, though I can't let him know it) she said to him, "I hope you are not tiring Stella."

He looked up sharply, as if he was awfully surprised to hear her saying my name, and then he gave me a queer little smile as if he were pleased with me. I believe they're fond of each other, but I've never seen them show any sign of affection.

But, O Eurydice, though they're awfully charming and interesting and dear, they're terribly unhappy. You feel it all the time—a dumb, blind pain that they can't get over or understand, and that nothing will ever induce them to show. They aren't a bit like the Arctic dog, who is always disagreeable unless he has a bone and Sir Julian. You know where you are with the Arctic dog.

Tell Mr. Travers I'll write directly I have fixed a date for my return.

Your ever-loving, disheveled, enthralled, perturbed, unfinished

STELLA.

P.S. I suppose as a family we all talk too much; we over-say things, and that makes them seem shallow. If you say very little, it comes out in chunks and sounds solid. You remember those dreadful old early-Saxon people we read once who never used adjectives? I think we ought to look them up.

CHAPTER XIX

Stella found Lady Verny weeding. She drew the weeds up very gracefully and thoroughly, with a little final shake.

It was a hard, shivering March morning. Next to the bed upon which Lady Verny was working was a sheet of snowdrops under a dark yew-hedge. They trembled and shook in the light air like a drift of wind-blown snow.

Stella hovered irresolutely above them; then she said:

"Lady Verny, I am afraid I must go back to the town hall next week. I haven't been any use."

Lady Verny elaborately coaxed out a low-growing weed, and then, with a vicious twist, threw it into the basket beside her.

"Why don't you go and talk to Julian?" she asked. "He can't be expected to jump a five-barred gate if he doesn't know it's there."

Stella hesitated before she spoke; then she said with a little rush:

"What I feel now is that I'm not the person to tell him—to tell him it's there, I mean. I don't know

why I ever thought I was. The person to tell him that would be some one he could notice like a light, not a person who behaves like a candle caught in a draft whenever he speaks to her."

"My dear," said Lady Verny, ruthlessly exposing, and one by one exterminating, a family of wireworms, "I fear you have no feminine sense. You have a great many other kinds,—of the mind, and no doubt of the soul. You should try to please Julian. You don't; you leave him alone, and in consequence he thinks he's a failure with you. Women with the feminine sense please a man without appearing to make the effort. The result is that the man thinks he's pleasing *them*, and a man who thinks that he has succeeded in pleasing an agreeable woman is not unaware of her."

"But I'm so afraid of him," pleaded Stella. "I don't believe you know how frightening he is."

"Yes," said Lady Verny; "he has lost his inner security. That makes a person very frightening, I know. He has become aggressive because he feels that something he has always counted on as a weapon has been withdrawn from him. It's like living on your wits; people who do that are always hard. I think you can give him the weapon back; but to succeed you must use all your own. You must go into a room as if it belonged to you. It's astonishing how this place suits you; but you must hold your head up, and lay claim to your kingdom."

"But I've never had a kingdom," objected Stella, "and I only want him to be interested in the idea of writing a book."

"Well, that's what I mean," said Lady Verny, decently interring the corpses of the worms. "At least it's part of what I mean. The only way to get Julian to write a book just now is to charm him. Men whose nerves and hearts are broken don't respond readily to the abstract. You can do what I can't, because I'm his mother. He's made all the concessions he could or ought to make to me. He promised not to take his life. Sometimes in these last few months I've felt like giving him his promise back. Now are you going to be afraid of trying to please Julian?"

"O Lady Verny," Stella cried, "you make me hate myself! I'll do anything in the world to please him; I'd play like a brass band, or cover myself with bangles like Cleopatra I Don't, *don't* think I'll ever be a coward again!"

"You needn't go as far as the bangles," said Lady Verny, smiling grimly. "Do it your own way, but don't be afraid to let Julian think you like him. He finds all that kind of thing rather hard to believe just now."

"He's been frozen up. Remember, if he isn't nice to you, that thawing is always rather a painful process. Now run along, and leave me in peace with my worms."

It cannot be said that Stella ran, but she went. She passed through the hall and down a passage; and wondered, if she had been an early-Christian martyr about to step into the arena, whether she wouldn't on the whole have preferred a tiger to Julian.

The door opened on a short passage at the end of which was an old oak doorway heavily studded with nails. She knew this must be Julian's room, because she heard Ostrog growling ominously from inside it. Julian presumably threw something at him which hit him, for there was the sound of a short snap, and then silence.

"Please come in," said Julian in a voice of controlled exasperation. Stella stepped quickly into the room, closing the door behind her.

It was a long, wide room with a low ceiling. There were several polar bear-skins on the floor, and a row of stuffed penguins on a shelf behind Julian's chair. Three of the walls were covered with bookcases; the fourth was bare except for an extraordinarily vivid French painting of a girl seated in a café. She had red hair and a desperate, laughing face, and was probably a little drunk. There was a famous artist's signature beneath her figure, but Stella had a feeling that Julian had known the girl and had not bought the picture for the sake of the signature.

Ostrog stood in front of her, growling, with every separate hair on his back erect.

"Keep quite still for a moment," said Julian, quickly. "Ostrog, lie down!" The dog very slowly settled himself on his haunches, with his red, savage eyes still fixed on Stella. "Now I think you can pass him safely," Julian added. "He has a peculiar dislike to human proximity, especially in this room. You can't write him down as one who loves his fellow-men, and I fear he carries his unsociability even further in respect to his fellow-women."

"It must be nice for you," said Stella, "to have some one who expresses for you what you are too polite to say for yourself."

Julian gave her a quick, challenging look.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Why should you suppose any such thing?"

"I expect because it is true," said Stella, quietly. "Of course you don't growl or show your teeth, and your eyes aren't red; but nobody could suppose when you said 'Come in' just now that you wanted anybody to come in."

"The chances were all in favor of its being somebody that I didn't want," explained Julian, politely. "For once they misled me. I apologize."

Stella smiled; her eyes held his for a moment. She did not contradict him, but she let him see that

she didn't believe him. "If he was ever really sorry," she thought, "he wouldn't apologize. When he's polite, it's because he isn't anything else."

"I came," she explained, "to ask you to lend me Professor Paulson's book on reindeer-moss. Will you tell me where it is and let me get it for myself, if Ostrog doesn't mind?"

To her surprise, Julian allowed her to find it for herself. Ostrog continued to growl, but without immediate menace. When she had found it, she took it across to Julian.

"Please don't run away," he said quickly, "unless you want to. Tell me what you intend to look up about the moss. I had a little tussle with Paulson over it once. He was an awfully able fellow, but he hadn't the health to get at his facts at first hand. That was unfortunate; second-hand accuracy leaks."

Stella sat down near him, and in a minute they were launched into an eager discussion. She had typed the book herself, and had its facts at her fingers'-end. She presented a dozen facets to her questions, with a light on them from her dancing mind.

Julian differed, defended himself, and explained, till he found himself at length in the middle of an account of his last expedition. He pulled himself up abruptly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "what a dark horse you are! Do tell me how you come to know anything about such a subject. Did you smuggle yourself into an Arctic expedition as a stowaway, or have you been prospecting gold at Klondike with a six-shooter and a sleeping-sack? It's amazing what you know about the North."

"It is not so uncanny as you think," said Stella, quietly. "I was Professor Paulson's secretary. For five years I studied the fauna and flora of arctic regions. I used to help him examine the tests brought back by explorers. He taught me how to understand and check climate and weather charts. All the collected specimens went through my hands. I did the drawings for this book, for instance. You know, a secretary is a kind of second fiddle. Give him a lead, and he catches up the music and carries it through as thoroughly, though not so loudly, as the first violin. I like being a second fiddle and I like the North."

"That's odd," said Julian, drawing his heavy eyebrows together. "I had an idea I had met Professor Paulson's secretary before."

"You are quite right," said Stella; "you did meet her before."

Julian stared at her; his eyes hardened.

"Do you mean that it was you I met at Sir Francis Young's?" he asked her. "You are Miss Young's great friend, then, are you not?"

Stella turned her eyes away from him. She hated to see him guarding himself against her.

"I was her friend," she said in a low voice; "but I have not seen her or heard from her for six months, nor have I written."

Sir Julian still looked at her, but the sternness of his eyes decreased.

She sat meekly beside him, with her drooping head, like the snowdrops she had brought in with her from the March morning. She did not look like a woman who could be set, or would set herself, to spy upon him. He acquitted her of his worst suspicions, but his pride was up in arms against her knowledge.

"It's too stupid for me," he said, "not to have recognized you immediately; for I haven't in the least forgotten you or our talk. You said some charming things, Miss Waring; but fate, a little unkindly, has proved them not to be true."

Stella turned her eyes back to his. She no longer felt any fear of him. She was too sorry for him to be afraid.

"No," she said eagerly, "I was perfectly right. I said you were strong. Things have happened to you,—horrible things,—but you're there; you're there as well as the things—in control of them. Why, look at what you've been telling me—the story of your last expedition! It's so fearfully exciting, and it's all, as you say, first-hand knowledge. You brought back with you the fruits of experience. Why don't you select and sort them and give them to the world?"

He looked at her questioningly.

"Do you mean these old arctic scraps?" he said slowly. "They might have mattered once, but they're all ancient history now. The flood and the fire have come on us since then. All that's as dead—as dead and useless as a crippled man. Besides, no one can write a book unless it interests him. I'm not even interested."

Stella's eyes fell; her breath came quickly.

"But don't you think," she said, "you could be made a little interested again? You were interested, weren't you, when you were talking to me a few minutes ago?"

Sir Julian laughed good-naturedly.

"I dare say I was interested talking to you," he said. "You're such a changeling: you play chess like a wizard and know the North like a witch. I'm afraid, Miss Waring, that interest in your conversation isn't in itself sufficient to turn a man into an author."

Stella rose slowly to her feet. She opened her lips as if to speak to Julian, but he was looking past her out of the window, with a little bitter smile that took away her hopefulness. Ostrog escorted her, growling less and less menacingly, to the door. Stella did not look back at Julian, and she forgot to hold her head up as she went out of the room. After she had gone Julian discovered that she had dropped two of her snowdrops on the floor. He picked them up carefully and laid them on his desk.

"A curious, interesting girl," he said to himself; "an incredible friend for Marian to have had. I wonder what made my mother take her up?"

CHAPTER XX

Lady Verny finished her weeding. It took her an hour and a half to do what she wanted to the bed; then she rose from her cramped position, and went into Julian's library by one of the French windows. She guessed that Stella had failed.

Julian was lying on a long couch, with his hands behind the back of his head and his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Lady Verny knew that, when he was alone, he was in the habit of lying like this for hours. He had told her that since his accident it amused him more than anything else.

She came in without speaking, and, drawing off her long gauntlets, folded them neatly together, and sat down, facing him.

Julian's eyes moved toward her as she entered; but he gave her no further greeting, and after a speculative glance his eyes returned to the ceiling.

"It's a pity," said Lady Verny, thoughtfully, "that poor child has to go back to the town hall next week, a dreadful, drafty place, and be made love to by a common little town clerk."

Julian's eyes flickered for a moment, but did not change their position.

"Town clerks," he observed, "are, I feel sure, distinguished persons who confine their passions to rates and taxes."

"That must make it all the more trying," said Lady Verny. "But I don't mind the town clerk as much as I mind the drafts. Stella had pleurisy before she came here; and you know what girls who do that kind of work eat—ghastly little messes, slopped on to marble tables, and tasting like last week's wash."

"Well, why the devil doesn't she look for another job?" Julian asked irritably. "She has brains enough for twenty. That's what I dislike about women: they get stuck anywhere. No dash in 'em, no initiative, no judgment." It was not what he disliked about women.

"She has tried," said Lady Verny. "The man she hoped to get a job from wouldn't have her. She tried this morning."

Julian's eyes moved now; they shot like a hawk's on to his mother's, while his body lay as still as a stone figure on a tomb.

"Then it was a trap," he said coldly. "I wondered. I thought we'd settled you were going to leave me alone."

"Yes," said Lady Verny in a gentle, even voice, "I know we had, Julian; but I can't bear it."

Julian's eyes changed and softened. He put his hand on her knee and let it rest there for a moment.

"I can, if it's only you," he said; "but I can't stand a lot of sympathetic women. One's a lot."

"You don't like her, then?" his mother asked. "I'm sorry; I always did from the first day I saw her. I don't know why; she hasn't any behavior."

"I don't dislike her," said Julian. "I don't think her behavior matters. She isn't at all a bother. I rather like her being so awfully little a woman; it's restful. Half the time I don't notice if she's in the room or not."

"And the other half of the time?" Lady Verny asked, with apparent carelessness.

"Oh, the other half of the time," said Julian, with a little, twisted smile, "I quite appreciate the fact that she is. Especially when you've taken the trouble to dress her as you did last night."

"I had to see what she looked like," Lady Verny explained defensively.

"I think, if you want her to stay in this house," said Julian, dryly, "you'd better let her look as little like that again as possible. I might have tolerated a secretary if I had wanted to write a book; but I'd tolerate no approach to a picture. She can go and be picturesque at the town hall. My artistic

sense has already been satisfied up to the brim. How did you get her to take the clothes she had on last night?"

"I told her," said Lady Verny, blushing, "that I had the materials by me, and couldn't possibly use them, as I was too old for light colors, and Girton could make her a simple little dress. And then I stood over Girton. As a matter of fact, I *did* send for the green jade comb and the shoes and stockings."

"You seem to me," said Julian, "to have entered most light-heartedly upon a career of crime and deceit unusual at your age. I don't wonder that you blush for it."

"It wasn't only you, Julian," Lady Verny pleaded. "I did want to help the girl. I can't bear public offices for gentlewomen. It's so unsuitable!"

"Most," agreed Julian. "But, my dear mother, this is a world in which the unsuitable holds an almost perfect sway, a fact which your usual good sense seldom overlooks."

"You don't know," said Lady Verny, earnestly, "how even a bad patch of ground facing north *can* improve with cultivation."

"Do what you like with the north side of the garden," replied Julian, "do even what you like with the apparently malleable Miss Waring; but please don't try the gardening habit any more on me."

Lady Verny sighed. Julian looked as inexpressive and immovable as a stone crusader.

Lady Verny was a patient woman, and she knew that, once seed is dropped, you must leave it alone.

She had learned to abstain from all the little labors of love which are its only consolations. From the first she had realized that the things she longed to do for Julian he preferred to have done for him by a servant.

She had accepted his preferences as the only outlet of her emotions; but when she saw he was fast approaching the place where nothing is left but dislikes, she made an effort to dislodge him. She was not sure, but she thought that she had failed. Without speaking again, she went back to the garden and did a little more digging before lunch. The earth was more malleable than Julian; digging altered it.

If you have never been able to buy any clothes except those which you could afford, none of them having any direct relation to the other, but merely replacing garments incapable of further use, to be dressed exactly as you should be is to obtain a new consciousness. It was not really Stella who looked with curious eyes at herself in a long mirror beneath the skilful hands of Girton. It was some hidden creature of triumphant youth with a curious, heady thirst for admiration. She gazed at herself with alien eyes.

"It's like an olive-tree," she said dreamily to Girton, "a silvery gray olive-tree growing in the South."

"I dare say, Miss," said Girton; "but if you was to remember when you sit down just to bring your skirts a trifle forward, it would sit better."

"Yes, Girton," said Stella, submissively. But the submission was only skin-deep. She knew that whatever she did, she couldn't go far wrong; her dress wouldn't let her. It gave her a freedom beyond the range of conduct. People whose clothes fit them, as its sheath of green fits a lily of the valley, become independent of their souls.

Julian's eyes had met hers last night with a perfectly different expression in them. He was too polite to look surprised, but he looked as soon as it was convenient, again.

Usually he looked at Stella as if he wanted to be nice to her, but last night for the first time he had looked as if he wished Stella to think him nice. She had had to hold her head up because of the jade comb.

It wouldn't matter how either of them looked now, as she was going away so soon; but she was glad that for once he had noticed her, even if his notice was inspired only by the green dress.

Julian did not appear at dinner; it was the first time since Stella's arrival that this had happened.

"He's had a bad day," Lady Verny explained. "He will get about more than he ought. It's a great strain on him, and then he suffers from fatigue and misery—not pain, exactly. I don't think he would mind that so much, but it makes him feel very helpless. He wants his chess though, if you don't mind going into his library and playing with him."

Julian was sitting up in his arm-chair when Stella joined him. His back was to the light, and the chess-board in front of him.

His face was gray and haggard, but there was a dogged spark of light in his eyes, as if he was amused at something.

"Thanks tremendously for coming in to cheer me up," he said quickly. "You see, I've dispensed with Ostrog for the evening, to prevent further comparison between us. D'you mind telling me why you didn't let me know this morning that, if I wrote a book, you'd work for me?"

Stella flushed, and let her jade comb sink beneath its level.

"If you didn't want to write the book," she said, "why should you want a secretary?"

"It didn't occur to you, I suppose," Sir Julian asked, "that if I wanted the secretary, I might wish to write the book?"

"What has Lady Verny said to you?" Stella demanded, lifting her head suddenly, and looking straight across at him.

"Nothing that need make you at all fierce," Julian replied, with amusement. "She said you were going back to the town hall next week, and I said I thought it was a pity. You don't seem to me in the least fitted for a town hall. I've no doubt you can do incredible things with drains, but I fear I have a selfish preference for your playing chess with me. My mother added that it was my fault; you were prepared, if I wished to write a book, to see me through it."

"Yes," said Stella, defensively, "I was prepared, if I thought you wanted it."

"I suppose you and my mother thought it would be good for me, didn't you?" asked Julian, suavely. "I have an idea that you had concocted a treacherous underground plot."

"We—I—well, if you'd *liked* it, it might have been good for you," Stella admitted.

"Most immoral," said Julian, dryly, "to try to do good to me behind my back, wasn't it? You see, I dislike being done good to; I happen very particularly to dislike it, and above all things I dislike it being done without my knowledge."

"Yes," said Stella, humbly. "So do I; I see that now. It was silly and interfering. Only, if you *had* been interested—"

"I wasn't in the least interested," said Julian, implacably, "but I'm glad you agree about your moral obliquity. My mother, of course, was worse; but there is no criminal so deep seated in her career as a woman under the sway of the maternal instinct. One allows for that. And now, Miss Waring, since neither of us likes being done good to, and since it's bad for you to go back to the town hall, and worse for me to remain unemployed, shall we pool this shocking state of things and write the book together?"

"Oh!" cried Stella with a little gasp. "But are you sure you want to?"

Julian laughed.

"I may be politer than Ostrog," he said, "but I assure you that, like him, unless reduced by force, I never do what I don't want to."

"And you haven't been reduced?" Stella asked a little doubtfully.

"Well," said Julian, beginning to place his chessmen, "I don't think so; do you? Where was the force?"

Stella could not answer this question, and Lady Verny, who might have been capable of answering it, was up-stairs.

CHAPTER XXI

Stella found that there were several Julians. The first one she knew quite well; he only wanted to be left alone. She dealt quite simply with him, as if he were Mr. Travers before Mr. Travers was human.

She came into his library every morning at ten o'clock, and this Julian, looking out of the window or at Ostrog or at the ceiling, dictated to her in a dry voice, slowly and distinctly, the first draft of a chapter.

Julian had never worked with an efficient woman before, and Stella's promptness and prevision surprised him; but this Julian never showed any surprise. He did the work he had set himself to do from the notes he had prepared before she came. If there were any facts of which he was doubtful, he asked her to look them up, telling her where she would be likely to find references to them. Stella went to the right bookcase by a kind of instinct, placed a careful hand on the book, and found the index with flying fingers. She never asked this Julian questions or troubled him with her own opinions. She carried off her notes without comment, and returned them to him carefully typed for his final inspection next morning. It was like the town hall, only quieter.

The second Julian was almost like a friend. He was a mischievous, challenging Julian, who wouldn't at any price have an impersonal, carefully drilled secretary beside him, but who insisted upon Stella's active cooperation. They discussed the chapter from every point before they wrote it. This Julian demanded her opinions; he dragged out her criticisms and fought them. He made their work together a perilous, inspiring tug-of-war. The chapters that resulted from this cooperation were by far the most interesting in the book. They even interested Julian.

But these were rare days, and what was most curious to Stella was that Julian, who seemed at

least to enjoy them as much as she did, should appear to want to suppress and curtail them. He was obviously reluctant to let the second Julian have his fling.

Stella saw the third Julian only in the evenings. He was a polite and courteous host, stranger to Stella than either of the others. He was always on his guard, as if he feared that either of the watchful women who wanted to see him happy might think he was happy or might, more fatally still, treat him as if he were unhappy.

While Stella and Lady Verny were anxiously watching the transformations of Julian, spring came to Amberley. It came very quietly, in a cold, green visibility, clothing the chilly, shivering trees in splendor. The hedges shone with a green as light as water, and out of their dried brown grasses the fields sprang into emerald. The streams that ran through the valley fed myriads of primroses. Stella found them everywhere, in lonely copses, in high-shouldered lanes, or growing like pale sunshine underneath the willows.

The spring was young and fugitive at Amberley; it fled before its own promises, and hid behind a cloak of winter. Dull gray days, cold showers, and nipping raw down winds defied it, and for weeks the earth looked as hard as any stone; but still the green leaves unsheathed themselves, and the birds sang their truculent triumphant songs, certain of victory.

Lady Verny spent all her time in the garden now, watching against dangers, preparing for new births, protecting the helpless, and leaving things alone. The bulbs were up and out already; crocus and daffodil, hyacinth and narcissus, flooded the glades and glens. Crocuses ran like a flock of small gold flames under the dark yew-hedges; daffodils streamed down the hillside to the lakes, looking as if they meant to overtake the sailing swans. The willows in the valley had apricot and pale-gold stems. They hung shivering over the lake like a race of phantom lovers searching for their lost brides.

Stella never saw Julian outdoors. He was always interested and polite about the garden, but he was never in it. He did not seem to want to see things grow. She did not know how far he could drag himself upon his crutches, and it gave her a little shock of surprise to find him one day in one of her favorite haunts.

It was outside the garden altogether, behind the village street. A sunk lane under high hedges led to a solitary farm. One of the fields on the way to it overlooked a sheltered copse of silver birches. Julian was stretched at full length under the hedge, looking down into the wood; his crutches lay beside him. Under the silver birches the ground was as blue as if the sky had sprung up out of the earth. There was no space at all for anything but bluebells. Far away in the valley a cuckoo called its first compelling notes.

Julian's face was set. He looked through the silver-and-blue copse as if it were not there; his eyes held a tortured universe.

Stella would have slipped away from him unseen, but his voice checked her.

"Is that you, Stella?" he asked quietly. "Won't you come and sit down here and look at this damned pretty world with me?"

His voice was startlingly bitter; it was the first time that he had used her name.

She came to him quickly, and sat down beside him, motionless and alert. She knew that this was yet another Julian, and an instinct told her that this was probably the real one.

He, too, said nothing for a moment; then he began to speak with little jerks between his sentences.

"What do you suppose," he said, "is the idea? You know what I mean? You saw the papers this morning? Have you ever seen a man gassed? I did once, in Wales—a mine explosion. We got to the fellows. One of them was dead, and one was mad, and one would have liked to be mad or dead. I rather gather that about two or three thousand Canadians were gassed near Ypres. They stood, you know,—stood as long as you can stand,—gassed. I always thought that phrase, 'died at their posts,' misleading. There aren't any posts, for one thing, and, then, dying—well, you don't die quickly from gas. If you're fairly strong, it's a solid performance, and takes at the least several hours.

"I beg your pardon. I oughtn't to talk to you like that. Please forgive me for being such a brute. On such a lovely morning, too! Are there any new bulbs up? I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"Julian—" said Stella.

He turned his head quickly and looked at her.

"Yes," he said; "what is it?"

"You ought to be ashamed *not* to talk to me," Stella said, with sudden fierceness. "Doesn't it make any difference to you that we're friends?"

He put his hand over hers.

"Yes," he said, smiling; "but I happen to be rather afraid of differences."

He took his hand away as quickly as he had touched her.

"Do you know," she asked in a low voice, "what was the saddest thing I ever saw—the saddest and the most terrible?"

"No," he said, turning his eyes carefully back to the silver birches; "but I have an idea that it was something that happened to somebody else."

"Yes," said Stella; "it happened to a sea-gull. It was the only time I ever went to the sea. Eurydice had been ill, and I went away with her. I think I was fourteen. I had gone out alone after tea on to the cliffs when I saw a motionless sea-gull at the very edge. I walked close up to it. It was as still as a stone, and when I came up, O Julian, one of its wings was broken! It could not fly again. Its eyes were searching the sea with such despair in them; it knew it could not fly again. I picked it up and carried it home. We did everything we could for it, but it died—like that, without ever changing the despair in its eyes—because it could not fly."

"Lucky brute to be able to die," said Julian under his breath. Stella said nothing. "Why did you tell me?" he asked after a pause. "Any lesson attached to it?"

She shook her head.

"You're not crying?" he asked suspiciously. Then he looked at her. She was sitting very still, biting her lips to keep her tears back.

"You really mustn't, Stella!" he urged in a queer, soft voice she had never heard him use before. "I'm not a sea-gull and I'm not dying, and I'm not even a stone."

"No," she whispered, "but you're just like the sea-gull: you won't share your pain."

"Look here," said Julian, "I—you—Would you mind sitting on that log over there,—it's quite dry,—just opposite? Thanks. Now I can talk more easily. I want you to remember that I'm a million times better off than most people. What troubles me isn't what the vicar calls my affliction. I'm rather proud of what I'm able to do with a pair of crutches in six months. It's being out of it; that's what set me off on those Canadian chaps. I miss the idea that I might be in that kind of thing, rather. You see, I feel quite well. I'll settle down to it in time, and I won't shut you out, if you'll remember not to let me—you're most awfully innocent, aren't you? D'you mind telling me how old you are?"

"Twenty-eight," said Stella. "But I'm not really innocent. I think I know all the horrible things."

Julian laughed ruefully. "You wouldn't see them coming though," he said; "and, besides, the things that aren't innocent are by no means always horrible. However, that's not what I was going to say. If we're to be friends at all, and it's not particularly easy even for me to live in the same house with you and not be friends, you'll have to help me pretty considerably."

"How shall I help you?" Stella asked eagerly. "I have wanted to, you know. I mean that I did sometimes think you wanted to be friends—as Mr. Travers did when he tried to become human because his cat died. I haven't told you about that; it made him see how important it was. And when you didn't want to be friendly, I tried not to bother you; I just went on with the work. That was the best way, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Julian, carefully. "You did the work uncommonly well, my dear, and you never bothered me in that way. I'm afraid I don't quite follow Mr. Travers. I suppose he is the town clerk, isn't he? He may have meant the same thing that I do; but I should have thought it would have been—well—simpler for him. I don't know how to explain to you what I mean. You remember Marian?" Stella nodded, "I came a cropper over Marian," Julian explained. "She behaved extraordinarily well. No one could possibly blame her; but she wasn't exactly the kind of woman I'd banked on, and I had banked on her pretty heavily. When I saw my mistake, I understood that I wasn't fit for marriage, and I became reconciled to it. I mean I accepted the idea thoroughly. It would be tying a woman to a log. But I don't want to start feeling just yet—any kind of feeling. Even nice, mild, pitying friendship like yours stings. D'you understand?"

"I'm not mild and I'm not pitying," said Stella, quietly. "And you don't only shut me out; you shut out everybody. Why, you won't even let yourself go over your old polar bears in the book!"

"I can't afford to let myself go," said Julian, "even to the extent of a polar bear—with you."

"Just because I'm a woman?" asked Stella, regretfully.

"If you like, you may put it that way," agreed Julian; "and as to the rest of the world, it's very busy just at present fighting Germans. All the men I like are either dead or will be soon. What's the use of getting 'em down here to look at a broken sign-post? I'd rather keep to myself till I've got going. I will get going again, and you'll help me, if you'll try to remember what I've just told you."

"Oh, I shall *remember* it," replied Stella, hurriedly; "only I don't quite know what it is. Still, I dare say, if I think it over, I shall find out. At any rate, I'm *very, very* glad you'll let me help you. Of course I think you're all wrong about the other men. You think too much of the outside of things. I dare say it's better than thinking too little, as we do in our family. Besides, you have such a lovely house and live so tidily. Still, I think it's a mistake. The men wouldn't see your crutches half as much as they'd see *you*. The things that matter most are always behind what anybody sees. Even all this beauty isn't half as beautiful as what's behind it—the spirit of the life that creates it, and brings it back again."

"And the ugliness," asked Julian, steadily, "the ugliness we've just been talking about over there, that long line of it cutting through France like a mortal wound, drawing the life-blood of Europe,—what's behind that?"

"Don't you see?" she cried, leaning toward him eagerly. "Exactly the same thing—life! All this quietness that reproduces what it takes away, only always more beautifully. Don't you think, while we see here the passing of the great procession of spring, behind in the invisible, where their poured-out souls have rushed to, is a greater procession still, forming for us to join? That even the ugliness is only an awful way out into untouched beauty, like a winter storm that breaks the ground up for the seed to grow?"

"I can see that *you* see it," said Julian, gently. "I can't see anything else just now. You'd better cut along back to the house; you'll be late for lunch. Tell my mother I'm not coming—and—and try not to think I'm horrid if I'm not always friendly with you. I sha'n't be so unfriendly as I sound."

"I don't believe you know," said Stella, consideringly, "how very nice I always think you—"

"That," said Julian, "happens to be exactly one of the things you'd better refrain from telling me. Good-by."

CHAPTER XXII

It is always hard to return in the character of a captive to a scene in which you have played the part of victor, and Julian had told the truth to Stella when he said that what stung him most was his new relation to women. Men knew what he had done; many of them were facing the same odds. They had a common experience and a common language to fall back upon. They were his mates, but they did not come near enough to him to hurt him; they had no wish to understand or help his sufferings. It was sufficient for them to say, "Hard luck!" and leave that side of it alone. Women were different: he had pursued women.

Julian had a good average reputation. Very few women attracted him beyond a certain point; but all his experiences had been successes.

He had loved Marian with the best love his heart had known; but it had been the love of Marian as a creature to possess. It had not been an invasion of his personality. He would have given anything to possess Marian; he had not been for a moment possessed by her. It did not seem to Julian that a woman could ever do more than charm a man.

She could charm you, if you let her, to distraction; but if you had any strength, you remained intact. Nothing in you moved to meet her charm. You simply, not to put too fine a point upon it, took what you could get. Naturally, if you could no longer let a woman charm you, she became, if she wasn't merely a nuisance, a menace.

Julian acquiesced in Stella's remaining as his secretary only because he had a theory that she did not charm him. He could not make head or tail of her. He recognized that she had a mind, but it was a perplexing and unchallenging mind, a private enjoyment of her own. She never attempted to attract Julian by it. If he stirred her, she ran off like a poet or a bird, upon her subject. She did not, as Julian supposed all women did, put Julian himself at the other end of her subject.

She had attractions: sympathy, wit, a charming, fugitive smile. She arranged them no better than she arranged her hair; and it was lamentable how she arranged her hair.

Julian could not have borne her constant presence if she had not effaced herself; his bitter self-consciousness would have been up in arms against an effective personality at his elbow. Nevertheless, he was obscurely annoyed that Stella made no attempt to impress him. She would sit there morning after morning without looking at him, without noticing him, without the lift of an eyelid to make him feel that he was anything to her but the supply of copy for his chapter. She was as inhuman and unpretentious as a piece of moss on a wall.

But her voice haunted him; he would catch snatches of her talk with Lady Verny in the garden. His mother had no scruple against intimacy with Stella, and Stella was not docile with Lady Verny; she was enchanting. She had a tantalizing voice full of music, with little gusts of mischief and revolt in it.

Julian told himself that he must put up with Stella for his mother's sake. Lady Verny did not make friends easily, and liked bookworms. He dismissed Stella as a bookworm. She had ways that, he told himself, were intensely annoying. She came punctually to her work,—probably the poor town clerk had taught her that much,—but she had no other punctualities. Bells, meals, the passage of time, had no landmarks for her. She seemed to drift along the hours like a leaf upon a stream.

She was disorderly: she left things about; books face downward, scraps of paper, flowers. She was always saying that she had lost her fountain-pen. She didn't say this to Julian, but he heard her say it to Ostrog, whom she accused outrageously of having eaten it, to all the servants, and to his mother. None of them seemed to mind, not even Ostrog.

Ostrog's growls had ceased. He slept in Stella's presence, uneasily, with half a red eye upon her; but he slept.

After a few days he chose a position close to her feet and slept solidly, with snores; finally he took her out for walks. Julian approved of this, since she would go all over the place by herself, hatless, and looking like a tramp, it was as well she should be accompanied by Ostrog.

Ostrog had never before been known to go for walks with any one except Julian. He took plenty of exercise independently of human control in the direction of rabbits.

Stella was extremely wasteful with writing-paper. Over and over again Julian saw her throw half a sheet, white and untouched, into the waste-paper basket; and she cut string. It was curious how little Julian felt annoyed by these depredations, considering how much he wished to be annoyed. He was not by nature economical, but he lashed himself into imaginary rages with Stella, and told her that she must once for all turn over a new leaf. She was quite meek about it, and next time she lost her fountain-pen she went into the village and bought a new one which wouldn't write. She paid for it with her own money, and Julian wanted to box her ears. He subsequently found the other one on the rack where he kept his pipes.

For some time he believed that she was not provocative because she was negligible. She was one of those clever neutral women who haven't the wit to be attractive.

Then one day it flashed across him that for all her mild agreement with his wishes, her spirit never for one instant surrendered to him. It did not even think of escaping; it was free.

This startled Julian. He liked evasive women, but he had thought Stella extraordinarily the opposite. She was as frank as a boy. But was this frankness merely because she was dealing with what was non-essential to her? He tried to make her talk; he succeeded perfectly.

Stella would talk about anything he liked. She enjoyed talking. She made Julian enjoy it; and then he found that he had arrived nowhere. She gave him her talk, as she gave him her attention, exactly as she would have got up and handed him a book if he had asked for it. There was no more of herself in it than in the simplest of her services.

Julian was not sure when it was that he discovered that he had a new feeling about her, which was even more disconcerting than her independence; it was anxiety.

Perhaps it was during the extremely slow and tiresome week-end on which Stella paid a visit to her family. She went without her umbrella,—not that it would have done much good if she had taken it, for Julian found, to his extreme vexation, that it was full of holes,—the weather was atrocious, and she came back with a cold.

It might have been gathered that no one at Amberley had ever had a cold before. As far as Julian was concerned nobody ever had.

Julian possessed a sane imagination, and generally treated the subject of health with a mixture of common sense and indifference. But this cold of Stella's!

It was no good Stella's saying it was a slight cold; he forced her to take a list of remedies suitable for severe bronchitis. He quarreled with his mother for saying that people had been known to recover from colds, and finally he sent for the doctor.

The doctor, being a wise man with a poor country practice, agreed with Julian that you could not be too careful about colds, and thought that priceless old port taken with her meals would not do Miss Waring any harm.

Stella disliked port very much, but she drank it submissively for a week.

"Nobody can call me fussy," Julian announced sternly, "but I will not have a neglected cold in the house."

He was not contradicted, though everybody knew that for weeks the cook and two housemaids had been sneezing about the passages.

It was a strange feeling, this sharp compulsion of fear. It taught Julian something. It taught him that what happened to Stella happened to himself. He no longer thought of pursuit in connection with her. He had found her in his heart.

It was an extremely awkward fact, but he accepted it. After all, he had crushed passions before which had gone against his code. He had iron self-control, and he thought it would be quite possible to stamp out this fancy before it got dangerous, even while he retained her presence.

He couldn't remain friendly to her, but he could be civil enough. He tried this process. For nine days it worked splendidly. Of course Stella didn't like it, but it worked. She had too much sense to ask him what was the matter, but she looked wistful. On the tenth she cut her finger sharpening a pencil, and Julian called her "Darling." Fortunately she didn't hear him, and he managed to bandage her finger up without losing his head; but he knew that it had been an uncommonly near shave, and if she hurt herself again, he wasn't at all sure how he would stand it.

Love flooded him like a rising tide; all his landmarks became submerged. He could not tell how far the tide would spread. He clung to Stella's faults with positive vindictiveness despite the fact that he had surprised himself smiling over them. He dared not let himself think about her qualities. The one support left to him was her own unconsciousness. He needn't tell her, and she wouldn't guess; and as long as she didn't know, he could keep her. If she did know, she would

have to go away; even if she didn't want to go, as she most probably would, he would have to send her away. He became as watchful of himself as he had been when his life depended on every word he said; but he could not help his eyes. When other people were there he did not look at Stella at all.

It was the first day Stella had been late for her work, and Julian had prepared to be extremely angry until he saw her face. She came slowly toward the open window out of the garden, looking oddly drawn and white. The pain in her eyes hurt Julian intolerably.

"Hullo!" he said quickly, "what's wrong?"

She did not answer at once; her hands trembled. She was holding a letter, face downward, as if she hated holding it.

"Your mother asked me to tell you myself," she began. "I am afraid to tell you; but she seemed to think you would rather—"

"Yes," said Julian, quickly. "Are you going away?"

"Oh, no," whispered Stella. "If it was only that!"

Julian said, "Ah!" It was an exclamation that sounded like relief. He leaned back in his chair, and did nothing further to help her.

Stella moved restlessly about the room. She had curious graceful movements like a wild creature; she became awkward only when she knew she was expected to behave properly. Finally she paused, facing a bookcase, with her back to Julian.

"Well?" asked Julian, encouragingly. "Better get it over, hadn't we? World come to pieces worse than usual this morning?"

"I don't know how to tell you," she said wretchedly. "For you perhaps it has—I have heard from Marian."

Julian picked up his pipe, which he had allowed to go out when Stella came in, relit it, and smiled at the back of her head. He looked extraordinarily amused and cheerful.

"She hadn't written to me," Stella went on without turning round, "for ages and ages,—you remember I told you?—and now she has."

"She was always an uncertain correspondent," said Julian, smoothly. "Am I to see this letter? Message for me, perhaps? Or doesn't she know you're here?"

"Oh, no!" cried Stella, quickly. "I mean there's nothing in it you couldn't see, of course. There *is* a kind of message; still, she didn't mean you actually to see it. She heard somehow that I was here, and she wanted me to tell you—" Stella's voice broke, but she picked herself up and went on, jerking out the cruel words that shook her to the heart,— "she wanted me to tell you that she's—she's going to be married."

Stella heard a curious sound from Julian incredibly like a chuckle. She flinched, and held herself away from him. He would not want her to see how he suffered. There was a long silence.

"Stella," said Julian at last in that singular, soft, new voice of his that he occasionally used when they were alone together, "the ravages of pain are now hidden. You can turn round."

She came back to him uncertainly, and sat down by the window at his feet. He had a tender teasing look that she could not quite understand. His eyes themselves never wavered as they met hers, but the eagerness in them wavered; his tenderness seemed to hold it back.

She thought that Julian's eyes had grown curiously friendly lately. Despite his pain, they were very friendly now.

"Any details?" Julian asked. "Don't be afraid to tell me. I'm not—I mean I'm quite prepared for it."

"It's to be next month," she said hurriedly. "She didn't want you to see it first in the papers."

"Awfully considerate of her, wasn't it?" interrupted Julian. "By the by, tell her when you write that she couldn't have chosen anybody better to break it to me than you."

"O Julian," Stella pleaded, "please don't laugh at me! Do if it makes you any easier, of course; only I—I mind so horribly!"

"Do you?" asked Julian, carefully. "I think I'm rather glad you mind, but you mustn't mind horribly; only as much as a friend should mind for another friend."

"That is the way I mind," said Stella.

She had a large interpretation of friendship.

"Oh, all right," said Julian, rather crossly. "Go on!"

"She says it's a Captain Edmund Stanley, and he's a D.S.O. They're to be married very quietly while he's on leave."

"Lucky man!" said Julian. "Any money?"

"Oh, I think so," murmured Stella, anxiously skipping the letter in her lap. "She says he's fairly well off."

"I think," observed Julian, "that we may take it that if Marian says Captain Stanley is fairly well off, his means need give us no anxiety. What?"

"Julian, must you talk like that?" Stella pleaded. "You'll make it so hard for yourself if you're bitter."

"On the whole, I think I must," replied Julian, reflectively. "If I talked differently, you mightn't like it; and, anyhow, I daren't run the risk. I might break down, you know, and you wouldn't like that, would you? Shall we get to work?"

"Oh, not this morning!" Stella cried. "I'm going out; I knew you wouldn't want me."

"Did you though?" asked Julian. "But I happen to want you most particularly. What are you going to do about it?"

She looked at him in surprise. He had a peculiarly teasing expression which did not seem appropriate to extreme grief.

"I'll stay, of course, if you want me," she said quietly.

"You're a very kind little elf," said Julian, "but I don't think you must make a precedent of my wanting you, or else—look here, d' you mind telling me a few things about your—your friendship with Marian?"

Stella's face cleared. She saw now why he wanted her to stay. She turned her eyes back to the garden.

"I'll tell you anything you like to know," she answered.

"You liked her?" asked Julian.

"She was so different from everybody else in my world," Stella explained. "I don't think I judged her; I just admired her. She was awfully good to me. I didn't see her very often, but it was all the brightness of my life."

"Stella, you've never told me about your life," Julian said irrelevantly. "Will you some day? I want to know about the town hall and that town clerk fellow."

"There isn't anything to tell you," said Stella. "I mean about that, and Marian was never in my life. She couldn't have been, you know; but she was my special dream. I used to love to hear about all her experiences and her friends; and then—do you remember the night of Chaliapine's opera? It was the only opera I ever went to, so of course I remember; but perhaps you don't. You were there with Marian. I think I knew then—"

"Knew what?" asked Julian, leaning forward a little. "You seem awfully interested in that gravel path, Stella?"

"Knew," she said, without turning her head, "what you meant to her."

"Where were you?" Julian inquired. "Looking down from the ceiling or up from a hole in the ground, where the good people come from? I never saw you."

"Ah, you wouldn't," said Stella. "I was in the gallery. Do you remember the music?"

"Russian stuff," Julian said. "Pack of people going into a fire, yes. Funnily enough, I've thought of it since, more than once, too; but I didn't know you were there."

"And then when you were hurt," Stella went on in a low voice, "Marian told me. Julian, she did mind *frightfully*. I always wanted you to know that she *did* mind."

"It altered her plans, didn't it," said Julian, "quite considerably?"

"You've no business to talk like that!" said Stella, angrily. "It's not fair—or kind."

"And does it matter to you whether I'm fair or kind?" Julian asked, with deadly coolness.

"I beg your pardon," said Stella, quickly. "Of course it has nothing to do with me. I have no right to—to mind what you say."

"I'm glad you recognize that," said Julian, quietly. "It facilitates our future intercourse. And you agreed with Marian that she only did her duty in painstakingly adhering to her given word? Perhaps you encouraged her to do it? The inspiration sounds quite like yours."

She looked at him now.

"Julian," she said, "am I all wrong? Would you rather that we weren't friends at all? You are speaking as if you hated me."

"No, I'm not," he said quickly, "you little goose! How could I keep you here if I hated you? Have a little sense. No, don't put your hand there, because, if you do, I shall take it, and I'm rather anxious just now not to. You shall go directly you've answered me this. Did you agree with Marian's point of view about me? You know what it was, don't you? She didn't love me any more;

she wished I had been killed, and she decided to stick to me. She thought I'd be grateful. Do you think I ought to have been grateful?"

"You know I don't! You know I don't!" cried Stella. "But why do you make me say it? I simply hated it—hated her not seeing, not caring enough to see, not caring enough to make you see. There! Is that all you wanted me to say?"

"Practically," said Julian, "but I don't see why you should fly into a rage over it. In your case, then, if it had been your case, you would simply have broken off the engagement at once, like a sensible girl?"

"I can't imagine myself in such a situation," said Stella, getting up indignantly.

"Naturally," interposed Julian smoothly. "But, still, if you had happened, by some dreadful mischance, to find yourself engaged to me—"

"I should have broken it off directly," said Stella, turning to go—"directly I found out—"

"Found out what?" asked Julian.

"That you were nothing but a cold-blooded tease!" cried Stella over her shoulder.

"You perfect darling!" said Julian under his breath. "By Jove! that was a narrow squeak!"

CHAPTER XXIII

It puzzled Stella extremely that she found herself unable to say, "What is it that you want, Julian?" She knew that there was something that he wanted, and there was nothing that she would dream of denying him. What, therefore, could be simpler than asking him? And yet she did not want to ask him.

She began by trying hard to understand what it was that he had told her above the bluebell wood, because she thought if she discovered what he wanted then, the rest would follow. He had wanted a particular kind of help from her; that was plain. It had something to do with her being a woman; that was plainer. But was it to his advantage or to his disadvantage that she was a woman? Ought she to suppress the fact or build on it? And how could she build on it or suppress it when she never felt in the least like anything else but a woman?

Cicely used to say that the only safe way with men was never to be nice to them; but Stella had always thought any risk was better than such a surly plan. Besides, Julian couldn't mean that. He liked her to be nice to him. She saw quite plainly that he liked her to be nice to him.

Unfortunately, Julian had taken for granted in Stella a certain experience of life, and Stella had never had any such experience. She had never once recognized fancy in the eyes of any man. As for love, it belonged solely to her dreams; and the dreams of a woman of twenty-eight, unharassed by fact, are singularly unreliable. She thought of Mr. Travers, but he did not count. She had never been able to realize what he had felt for her. Her relation to him was as formal, despite his one singular lapse, as that of a passenger to a ticket-collector. She had nothing to go on but her dreams.

In her very early youth she had selected for heroes two or three characters from real life. They were Cardinal Newman, Shelley, and General Gordon. Later, on account of a difference in her religious opinions, she had replaced the Cardinal by Charles Lamb. None of these characters was in the least like Julian.

One had apparently no experience of women, the other two had sisters, and Shelley's expression of love was vague and might be said to be misleading.

She met me, robed in such exceeding glory,
That I beheld her not.

Life had unfortunately refused to meet Shelley on the same terms, and difficulties had ensued, but it was this impracticable side of him that Stella had accepted. She had skipped Harriet, and landed on "Epipsychidion." Love was to her "a green and golden immortality." She was not disturbed by it, because the deepest experiences of life do not disturb us. What disturbs us is that which calls us away from them.

It made it easier to wait to find out what Julian wanted that he was happier with her. He was hardly ever impersonal or cold now, and he sometimes made reasons to be with her that had nothing to do with their work.

It was June, and the daffodils had gone, but there were harebells and blue butterflies upon the downs, and in the hedges wild roses and Star of Bethlehem. Lady Verny spent all her time in the garden. She said the slugs alone took hours. They were supposed by the uninitiated to be slow, but express trains could hardly do more damage in less time. So Stella and Ostrog took their walks alone, and were frequently intercepted by Julian on their return.

Julian, who ought to have known better, thought that the situation might go on indefinitely, and

Stella did not know that there was any situation; she knew only that she was in a new world. There was sorrow outside it, there was sorrow even in her heart for those outside it; but through all sorrow was this unswerving, direct experience of joy. She would have liked to share it with Julian, but she thought it was all her own, and that what he liked about her—since he liked something—was her ability to live beyond the margin of her personal delight. The color of it was in her eyes, and the strength of it at her heart; but she never let it interfere with Julian. She was simply a companion with a hidden treasure. She sometimes thought that having it made her a better companion; but even of this she was not sure.

It made her a little nervous taking Ostrog out alone, but she always took the lead with him, and slipped it on him if a living creature appeared on the horizon. There were some living creatures he didn't mind, but you couldn't be sure which.

One evening she was tired and forgot him. There was a wonderful sunset. She stood to watch it in a hollow of the downs where she was waiting for Julian. The soft, gray lines rose up on each side of her, immemorial, inalterable lines of gentle land. The air was as transparently clear as water, and hushed with evening. Far below her, where the small church steeple sprang, she saw the swallows cutting V-shaped figures to and fro above the shining elms.

For a long time she heard no sound, and then, out of the stillness, came a faint and hollow boom. Far away across the placid shapes of little hills, over the threatened seas, the guns sounded from France—the dim, intolerable ghosts of war.

Ostrog, impatient of her stillness, bounded to the edge of the hollow and challenged the strange murmur to the echo. He was answered immediately. A sheep-dog shot up over the curve of the down. Ostrog was at his throat in an instant.

There was a momentary recoil for a fresh onslaught, and then the shrieks of the preliminary tussle changed into the full-throated growl of combat. There was every prospect that one or other of them would be dead before their jaws unlocked.

Stella hovered above them in frantic uncertainty. She was helpless till she saw that there was no other help. The sheep-dog had had enough; a sudden scream of pain stung her into action. She seized Ostrog's hind leg and twisted it sharply from under him.

At the moment she did so she heard Julian's voice:

"Wait! For God's sake, let go!"

But she could not wait; the sheep-dog was having the life squeezed out of him. She tugged and twisted again. Ostrog's grip slackened, he flung a snap at her across his shoulder, and then, losing his balance, turned on her in a flash. She guarded her head, but his teeth struck at her shoulder. She felt herself thrust back by his weight, saw his red jaws open for a fresh spring, and then Julian's crutch descended sharply on Ostrog's head. Ostrog dropped like a stone, the bob-tailed sheep-dog crawled safely away, and Stella found herself in Julian's arms.



She tugged and twisted again

"Dearest, sure you're not hurt? Sure?" he implored breathlessly, and then she knew what his eyes asked her, they were so near her own and so intent; and while her lips said, "Sure, Julian," she knew her own eyes answered them.

He drew her close to his heart and kissed her again and again.

The idea of making any resistance to him never occurred to Stella. Nothing that Julian asked of her could seem strange. She only wondered, if that was what he wanted, why he had not done it before.

He put her away from him almost roughly.

"There," he said, "I swore I'd never touch you! And I have! I'm a brute and a blackguard. Try and believe I'll never do it again. Promise you won't leave me? Promise you'll forgive me? I was scared out of my wits, and that's a fact. D' you think you can forgive me, Stella?"

"But what have I to forgive?" Stella asked. "I let you kiss me."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Julian, half laughing, "you are an honest woman! Well, if you did, you mustn't 'let me' again, that's all. Ostrog, you wretch, lie down! You ought to have a sound thrashing. I'd have shot you if you'd hurt her; but as I've rather scored over the transaction, I'll let you off."

Stella looked at Julian thoughtfully.

"Why mustn't I let you again?" she inquired, "if that is what you want?"

Julian, still laughing, but half vexed, looked at her.

"Look here," he said, "didn't I tell you you'd got to help me? I can't very well keep you here and behave to you like that, can I?"

Stella considered for a moment, then she said quietly, "Were you flirting with me, Julian?"

"I wish to God I was!" said Julian, savagely. "If I could get out of it as easily as that, d'you suppose I should have been such a fool as not to have tried?"

"I don't think you would have liked me to despise you," said Stella, gently. "You see, if you had given me nothing when I was giving you all I had, I should have despised you."

Julian stared at her. She was obviously speaking the truth, but in his heart he knew that if she had loved him and he had flirted with her, he would have expected her to be the one to be despised.

He put out his hand to her and then drew it back sharply.

"No, I'm hanged if I'll touch you," he said under his breath. "I love you all right,—you needn't despise me for that,—but telling you of it's different. I was deadly afraid you'd see; any other woman would have seen. I've held on to myself for all I was worth, but it hasn't been the least good, really. I suppose I've got to be honest about it: I can't keep you with me, darling; you'll have to go. It makes it a million times worse your caring, but it makes it better, too."

"I don't see why it should be worse at all," said Stella, calmly. "If we both care, and care really, I don't see that anything can be even bad."

Julian pulled up pieces of the turf with his hand. He frowned at her sternly.

"You mustn't tempt me," he said; "I told you once I can't marry."

"You told me once, when you didn't know I cared," agreed Stella. "I understand your feeling that about a woman who didn't care or who only cared a little, but not about a woman who really cares."

"But, my dear child," said Julian, "that's what just makes it utterly impossible. I can't understand how I ever was such a selfish brute as to dream of taking Marian. I was ill at the time, and hadn't sized it up; but if you think I'm going to let *you* make such a sacrifice, you're mistaken. I'd see you dead before I married you!"

Stella's eyebrows lifted, but she did not seem impressed.

"I think," she said gently, "you talk far too much as if it had only got to do with you. Suppose I don't wish to see myself dead?"

"Well, you must try to see the sense of it," Julian urged. "You're young and strong; you ought to have a life. I'm sure you love children. You like to be with me, and all that; you're the dearest companion a man ever had. It isn't easy, Stella, to say I won't keep you; don't make it any harder for me. I've looked at this thing steadily for months. I don't mind owning that I thought you might get to care if I tried hard enough to make you; but, darling, I honestly didn't try. You can't say I wasn't awfully disagreeable and cross. I knew I was done for long ago, but I thought you were all right. You weren't like a girl in love, you were so quiet and—and sisterly and all that. If I'd once felt you were beginning to care in that way, I'd have made some excuse; I wouldn't have let it come to this. I'd rather die than hurt you."

"Well, but you needn't hurt me," said Stella, "and neither of us need die. It's not your love that wants to get rid of me, Julian; it's your pride. But I haven't any pride in that sense, and I'm not going to let you do it."

"By Jove! you won't!" cried Julian. His eyes shot a gleam of amusement at her. It struck him that the still little figure by his side was extraordinarily formidable. He had never thought her formidable before. He had thought her brilliant, intelligent, and enchanting, not formidable; but he had no intention of giving way to her. Formidable or not, he felt quite sure of himself. He couldn't let her down.

"The sacrifice is all the other way," Stella went on. "You would be sacrificing me hopelessly to your pride if you refused to marry me simply because some one of all the things you want to give me you can't give me. Do you suppose I don't mind,—mind for you, I mean, hideously,—mind so much that if I were sure marrying you would make you feel the loss more, I'd go away from you this minute and never come near you again? But I do not think it will make it worse for you. You will have me; you will have my love and companionship, and they are—valuable to you, aren't they, Julian?"

Julian's eyes softened and filled.

"Yes," he muttered, turning his head away from her; "they're valuable."

"Then," she said, "if you are like that to me, if I want you always, and never anybody else, have you a right to rob me of yourself, Julian?"

"If I could believe," he said, his voice shaking, "that you'd never be sorry, never say to yourself, 'Why did I do it?' But, oh, my dear, you know so little about the ordinary kind of love! You don't realize a bit, and I do. It must make it all so confoundedly hard for you, and I'm such an impatient chap. I mightn't be able to help you. And you're right: I'm proud. If I once thought you cared less or regretted marrying me, it would clean put the finish on it. But you're not right about not loving you, Stella, that's worse than pride; loving you makes it impossible. I can't take the risk for you. I'll do any other mortal thing you want, but not that!"

"Julian," asked Stella in a low voice, "do you think I am a human being?"

"Well, no!" said Julian. "Since you ask me, more like a fairy or an elf or something. Why?"

"Because you're not treating me as if I were," said Stella, steadily. "Human beings have a right to their own risks. They know their own minds, they share the dangers of love."

"Then one of 'em mustn't take them all," said Julian, quickly.

"How could one take them all?" said Stella. "I have to risk your pride, and you have to risk my regret. As a matter of fact, your pride is more of a certainty than a risk, and my regret is a wholly imaginary idea, founded upon your ignorance of my character. Still, I'm willing to put it like that to please you. You have every right to sacrifice yourself to your own theories, but what about sacrificing me? I give you no such right."

For the first time Julian saw what loving Stella would be like; he would never be able to get to the end of it. Marriage would be only the beginning. She had given him her heart without an effort, and he found that she was as inaccessible as ever. His soul leaped toward this new, unconquerable citadel. He held himself in hand with a great effort.

"What you don't realize," he said, "is that our knowledge of life is not equal. If I take you at your word, you will make discoveries which it will be too late for you to act upon. You cannot wish me to do what is not fair to you."

"I want my life to be with you," said Stella. "Whatever discoveries I make, I shall not want them to be anywhere else. You do not understand, but if you send me away, you will take from me the future which we might have used together. You will not be giving me anything in its place but disappointment and utter uselessness. You'll make me—morally—a cripple. Do you still wish me to go away from you?"

Julian winced as if she had struck him.

"No, I'll marry you," he said; "but you've made me furiously angry. Please go home by yourself. I wonder you dare use such an illustration to me."

Stella slipped over the verge of the hollow. She, too, wondered how she had dared; but she knew quite well that if she hadn't dared, Julian would have sent her away.

CHAPTER XXIV

Stella was afraid that when she went down to dinner it would be like slipping into another life—a life to which she was attached by her love for Julian, but to which she did not belong. It did not seem possible to her that Lady Verny would be able to bear her as a daughter-in-law. As a secretary it had not mattered in the least that she was shabby and socially ineffective. And she couldn't be different; they'd have to take her like that if they took her at all. She ranged them

together in her fear of their stateliness; she almost wished that they wouldn't take her at all, but let her slink back to Redcliffe Square and bury herself in her own insignificance.

But when she went down-stairs she found herself caught in a swift embrace by Lady Verny, and meeting without any barrier the adoration of Julian's eyes.

"My dear, my dear," said Lady Verny, "I always felt that you belonged to me."

"But are you pleased?" whispered Stella in astonishment.

"Pleased!" cried Lady Verny, with a little shaken laugh. "I'm satisfied; a thing that at my age I hardly had the right to expect."

"Mother thinks it's all her doing," Julian explained. "It's her theory that we've shown no more initiative than a couple of guaranteed Dutch bulbs. Shall I tell you what she was saying before you came down-stairs?"

"Dear Julian," said Lady Verny, blushing like a girl, "you're so dreadfully modern, you will frighten Stella if you say things to her so quickly before she has got used to the idea of you."

"She's perfectly used to the idea of me," laughed Julian, "and I've tried frightening her already without the slightest success. Besides, there's nothing modern about a madonna lily, which is what we were discussing. My mother said, Stella, that she didn't care very much for madonna lilies in the garden. They're too ecclesiastical for the other flowers, but very suitable in church for weddings. And out in ten days' time, didn't you say, Mother? I hope they haven't any of Stella's procrastinating habits."

"You mustn't mind his teasing, dear," Lady Verny said, smiling. "We will go in to dinner now. You're a little late, but no wonder. I am delighted to feel that now I have a right to scold you."

"The thing that pleases me most," said Julian, "is that I shall be able to remove Stella's apples and pears forcibly from her plate and peel them myself. I forget how long she has been here, but the anguish I have suffered meal by meal as I saw her plod her unreflecting way over their delicate surfaces, beginning at the stalk and slashing upward without consideration for any of the laws of nature, nothing but the self-control of a host could have compelled me to endure. I offered to peel them for her once, but she said she liked peeling them; and I was far too polite to say, 'Darling, you've got to hand them over to me.' I'm going to say it now, though, every time."

"Hush, dear," said Lady Verny, nervously. "Thompson has barely shut the door. I really don't know what has happened to your behavior."

"I haven't any," said Julian. "I'm like the old lady in the earthquake who found herself in the street with no clothes on. She bowed gravely to a gentleman she had met the day before and said, 'I should be happy to give you my card, Mr. Jones, but I have lost the receptacle.' Things like that happen in earthquakes. I have lost my receptacle." He met Stella's eyes and took the consent of her laughter. He was as happy with her as a boy set loose from school.

Lady Verny, watching him, was almost frightened at his lack of self-restraint. "He has never trusted any one like this before," she thought. "He is keeping nothing back." It was like seeing the released waters of a frozen stream.

While they sat in the hall before Julian rejoined them, Lady Verny showed Stella all the photographs of Julian taken since he was a baby.

There was a singularly truculent one of him, at three years old, with a menacingly poised cricket-bat, which Stella liked best of all. Lady Verny had no copy of it, but she pressed Stella to take it.

"Julian will give you so many things," she said; "but I want to give you something that you will value, and which is quite my own." So Stella took the truculent baby, which was Lady Verny's own.

"You look very comfortable sitting there together; I won't disturb you for chess," Julian observed when he came in shortly afterward. "I was wondering if you would like to hear what I did in Germany. It's a year old now and as safe with you as with me, but it mustn't go any further."

Julian told his story very quietly, leaning back against the cushions of a couch by the open window. Above his head, Stella could see the dark shapes of the black yew hedges and the wheeling of the bats as they scurried to and fro upon their secret errands.

Neither Lady Verny nor Stella moved until Julian had finished speaking. It was the most thrilling of detective stories; but it is not often that the roots of our being are involved in detective stories.

They could not believe that he lay there before them, tranquilly smoking a cigarette and breathed on by the soft June air. As they watched his face comfort and security vanished. They were in a ruthless world where a false step meant death. Julian had been in danger, but it was never the danger which he had been in that he described; it was the work he had set out to do and the way he had done it. He noticed danger only when it obstructed him. Then he put his wits to meet it. They were, as Stella realized, very exceptional wits for meeting things. Julian combined imagination with strict adherence to fact. He had the courage which never broods over an essential risk and the caution which avoids all unnecessary ones.

"Of course," he broke off for a moment, "you felt all the time rather like a flea under a

microscope. Don't underrate the Germans. As a microscope there's nothing to beat them; where the microscope leaves off is where their miscalculations begin. A microscope can tell everything about a flea except where it is going to hop.

"I had a lively time over my hopping; but the odd part of it was the sense of security I often had, as if some one back of me was giving me a straight tip. I don't understand concentration. You'd say it is your own doing, of course, and yet behind your power of holding on to things, it seems as if Something Else was holding on much harder. It's as if you set a ball rolling, and some one else kicked it in the right direction.

"After I'd been in Germany for a month I began to believe in an Invisible Kicker-Off. It was company for me, for I was lonely. I had to calculate every word I said, and there's no sense of companionship where one has to calculate. The feeling that there was something back of me was quite a help. I'd get to the end of my job, and then something fresh would be pushed toward me.

"For instance, I met a couple of naval officers by chance,—I wasn't out for anything naval,—and they poured submarine facts into me as you pour milk into a jug—facts that we needed more than the points I'd come to find out.

"I'm not at all sure," Julian finished reflectively, "that if you grip hard enough under pressure, you don't tap facts.

"Have you ever watched a crane work? You shift a lever, and it comes down as easily as a parrot picks up a pencil; it'll lift a weight that a hundred men can't move an inch, and swing it up as if it were packing feathers. Funny idea, if there's a law that works like that.

"I came back through Alsace and Lorraine, meaning to slip through the French lines. A sentry winged me in the woods. Pure funk on his part; he never even came to hunt up what he'd let fly at. But it finished my job."

Lady Verny folded up her embroidery.

"It was worth the finish, Julian," she said quickly. "I am glad you told me, because I had not thought so before." Then she left them.

"It isn't finished, Julian," murmured Stella in a low voice. "It never can be when it's you."

"Well," said Julian, "it's all I've got to give you; so I'm rather glad you like it, Stella."

They talked till half the long summer night was gone. She sat near him, and sometimes Julian let his hand touch her shoulder or her hair while he unpacked his heart to her. The bitterness of his reserve was gone.

"I think perhaps I could have stood it decently if it hadn't been for Marian," he explained. "I was damned weak about her, and that's a fact. You see, I thought she had the kind of feeling for me that women sometimes have and which some men deserve; but I'm bound to admit I wasn't one of them. When I saw that Marian took things rather the way I should have taken them myself, I went down under it. I said, 'That's the end of love.' It was the end of the kind I was fit for, the kind that has an end.

"Now I'm going to tell you something. I never shall again, so you must make the most of it, and keep it to hold on to when I behave badly. You've put the fear of God into me, Stella. Nothing else would have made me give in to you; and you know I have given in to you, don't you?"

"You've given me everything in the world I want," said Stella, gently, "if that's what you call giving in to me."

"I've done more than that," said Julian, quietly. "I've let you take my will and turn it with that steady little hand of yours; and it's the first time—and I don't say it won't be the last—that I've let any man or woman change my will for me.

"Now I'm going to send you to bed. I oughtn't to have you kept you up like this; but if I've got to let you go back to your people to-morrow, we had to know each other a little better first, hadn't we? I've been trying not to know you all these months.

"Before you go, would you mind telling me about Mr. Travers and the cat?"

"No," said Stella, with a startled look; "anything else in the world, Julian, but not Mr. Travers and the cat."

"Ostrog and I are frightfully jealous by nature," Julian pleaded. "He wouldn't be at all nice to that cat if he met it without knowing its history."

"He can't be unkind to the poor cat," said Stella; "it's dead."

"And is Mr. Travers dead, too?" asked Julian.

"I should think," said Stella, "that he was about as dead as the red-haired girl in the library."

"What red-haired girl?" cried Julian, sharply. "Who's been telling you—I mean what made you think I knew her? It's a remarkably fine bit of painting."

"But you did know her," said Stella; "only don't tell me anything about her unless you want to."

"I won't refuse to answer any questions you ask," said Julian after a pause, "but I'd much rather wait until we're married. I am a little afraid of hurting you; you wouldn't be hurt, you see, if you were used to me and knew more about men. You're an awfully clever woman, Stella, but the silliest little girl I ever knew."

"I'll give up the red-haired girl if you'll give up Mr. Travers," said Stella. She rose, and stood by his side, looking out of the window.

"Do you want to say good night, or would you rather go to bed without?" he asked her.

"Of course I'll say good night," said Stella. "But, Julian, there are some things I so awfully hate your doing. Saying good night doesn't happen to be one of them. It's lighting my candle unless I'm sure you want to. I want to be quite certain you don't mind me in little things like that."

Julian put his arms round her and kissed her as gently as he would have kissed a child. "Of course you shall light your candle," he said tenderly, "just to show I don't mind you. But it isn't my pride now. I don't a bit object to your seeing I can't. I'm quite sure of you, you see; unless you meant to hurt me, you simply couldn't do it. And if you meant to hurt me, it would be because you wanted to stop me hurting myself, like this afternoon, wouldn't it?"

Stella nodded. She wanted to tell him that she had always loved him, long before he remembered that she existed. All the while he had felt himself alone, she was as near him as the air that touched his cheek. But she could not find words in which to tell him of her secret companionship. The instinct that would have saved them only brushed her heart in passing.

Julian was alarmed at her continued silence.

"You're not frightened or worried or anything, are you?" he asked anxiously. "Sure you didn't mind saying good night? It's not compulsory, you know, even if we are engaged. I'd hate to bother you."

"I'm not bothered," Stella whispered; "I—only love you. I was saying it to you in my own way."

"I'll wait three days for you," said Julian, firmly. "Not an hour more. You quite understand, don't you, that I'm coming up at the end of three days to bring you home for good?"

Stella shivered as she thought of Redcliffe Square. Julian wouldn't like Redcliffe Square, and she wouldn't be able to make him like it; and yet she wouldn't be able not to mind his not liking it.

Julian knew nothing about Redcliffe Square, but he noticed that Stella shivered when he told her that he was going to bring her home for good.

CHAPTER XXV

It would be too strong an expression to say that after Stella's departure Julian suffered from reaction. He himself couldn't have defined what he suffered from, but he was uneasy.

He had given himself away to Stella as he had never in his wildest dreams supposed that one could give oneself away to a woman. But he wasn't worrying about that; he hadn't minded giving himself away to Stella.

Samson was the character in the Old Testament whom Julian most despised, because he had let Delilah get things out of him. What Samson had got back hadn't been worth it, and could probably have been acquired without the sacrifice of his hair. He had simply given in to Delilah because he had a soft spot for her; and Delilah quite blamelessly (from Julian's point of view) had retaliated by crying out, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!"

Julian had always felt perfectly safe with women of this type; they couldn't have entrapped him. But there wasn't an inch of Delilah in Stella. She had no Philistines up her sleeve for any of the contingencies of life and she had not tried to get anything out of Julian.

That was where his uneasiness began. He understood her sufficiently to trust her, but he was aware that beyond his confidence she was a mapless country; he did not even know which was water and which was land. His uncertainty had made him shrink from telling Stella about Eugénie Matisse.

If Marian had been sharp enough—she probably wouldn't have been—to guess that Julian knew the girl in the picture, she would have known, too, precisely what kind of girl she was, and she would have thought none the worse of Julian.

But he didn't know what Stella expected. He wasn't afraid that she would cast him off for that or any other of his experiences; then he would have told her. She would have forgiven him as naturally as she loved him; but what if her forgiveness had involved her pain?

He had spoken the truth when he told Stella that she had "put the fear of God into him." Julian had not known much about God before or anything about fear; but he was convinced now that the fear of God was not that God might let you down, but that you might let down God. He wanted to be as careful of Stella as if she had been a government secret.

Did she know in the least what she was in for. Or was she like an unconscious Iphigenia vowed off to mortal peril by an inadvertent parent?

He had done his best to make her realize the future, but there are certain situations in life when doing one's best to make a person aware of a fact is equivalent to throwing dust in his eyes. And Stella herself might by a species of divine fooling, have outwitted both himself and her. She might be marrying Julian for pity under the mask of love.

Her pity was divine, and he could stand it for himself perfectly; but he couldn't stand it for her. Why had she shivered when he had said he was going to bring her home? He cursed his helplessness. If he had not been crippled he would have taken her by surprise, and let his instincts judge for him; but he had had to lie there like a log, knowing that if he asked her to come to him, she would have blinded him by her swift, prepared responsiveness.

The moment on the downs hardly counted. She had been so frightened that it had been like taking advantage of her to take her in his arms.

The one comfort he clung to was her fierce thrust at his pride. He repeated it over and over to himself for reassurance. She had said, if he wouldn't marry her, he would make her morally a cripple. That really sounded like love, for only love dares to strike direct at the heart. If he could see her, he knew it would be all right; if even she had written (she had written, of course, but had missed the midnight post), he would have been swept back into the safety of their shared companionship. But in his sudden loneliness he mistrusted fortune. When a man has had the conceit knocked out of him, he is not immediately the stronger for it; and he is the more vulnerable to doubt not only of himself, but of others. The saddest part of self-distrust is that it breeds suspicion.

It would be useless to speak to his mother about it, for, though a just woman, she was predominantly his mother; she wanted Stella too much for Julian to admit a doubt of Stella's wanting him for herself. She would have tried to close all his questions with facts. This method of discussion appealed to Julian as a rule, but he had begun to discover that there are deeper things than facts.

Lady Verny was in London at a flower show, and Julian was sitting in the summer-house, which he was planning to turn into a room for Stella. His misgivings had not yet begun to interfere with his plans. He had just decided to have one of the walls above the water meadows replaced by glass when his attention was attracted by the most extraordinary figure he had ever seen.



The most extraordinary figure we had ever seen

She was advancing rapidly down a grass path, between Lady Verny's favorite herbaceous borders, pursued by the butler. At times Thompson, stout and breathless, succeeded in reaching her side, evidently for the purpose of expostulation, only to be swept backward by the impetuosity of her speed. Eurydice was upon a secret mission. She had borrowed a pound from

Stella with which to carry it out; and she was not going to be impeded by a butler.

She no longer followed the theories of Mr. Bolt, but she still had to wear out the kind of clothes that went with Mr. Bolt's theories. He liked scarlet hats. Eurydice's hat was scarlet, and her dress was a long purple robe that hung straight from her shoulders.

It was cut low in the neck, with a system of small scarlet tabloids let in around the shoulders. Golden balls, which were intended to represent pomegranates, dangled from her waist.

Eurydice's hair was thick and very dark; there was no doing anything with it. Her eyebrows couched menacingly above her stormy eyes. Her features were heavy and colorless, except her mouth, which was unnaturally (and a little unevenly) red.

She wore no gloves,—she had left them behind in the train,—and she carried a scarlet parasol with a broken rib.

"I wish you'd send this man away," she said as she approached Julian. "He keeps getting under my feet, and I dislike menials. I saw where you were for myself. I nearly got bitten by a brute of a dog on the terrace. You have no right to keep a creature that's a menace to the public."

"I regret that you have been inconvenienced," said Julian, politely; "but I must point out to you that the public are not expected upon the terrace of a private garden."

"As far as that goes," said Eurydice, frowning at a big bed of blue Delphiniums, "nobody has a right to have a private garden."

Thompson, with an enormous effort, physical as well as spiritual, cut off the end of the border by a flying leap, and reached the young woman's elbow.

"If you please, Sir Julian," he gasped, "this lady says she'd rather not give her name. She didn't wish to wait in the hall, nor in the drawing-room, sir, and I've left James sitting on Ostrog's 'ead,—or I'd have been here before. What with one thing and another, Sir Julian, I came as quickly as I could."

"I saw you did, Thompson," said Julian, with a gleam of laughter; "and now you may go. Tell James to get off Ostrog's head." He turned his eyes on his visitor. "I am Miss Waring," she said as the butler vanished.

"This is extraordinarily kind of you," Julian said, steadying himself with one hand, and holding out his other to Eurydice. "I think you must be Miss Eurydice, aren't you? I was looking forward to meeting you to-morrow. I hope nothing is wrong with Stella?"

"Everything is wrong with her," flashed Eurydice, ignoring his outstretched hand; "but she doesn't know I've come to talk to you about it. She'd never forgive me if she did. So if I say anything you don't like, you can revenge yourself on me by telling her. I haven't come to be *kind*, as you call it. I care far too much for the truth."

"Still, you may as well sit down," said Julian, drawing a chair toward her with his free hand. "The truth is quite compatible with a wicker arm-chair. You needn't lean back in it if you're afraid of relaxing your moral fiber."

"As to revenge, I always choose my own, and even if you make it necessary, I don't suppose it will include your sister. What you suggest would have the disadvantage of doing that, wouldn't it? I mean the disadvantage to me. It hasn't struck you apparently as a disadvantage that you are acting disloyally toward your sister in doing what you know she would dislike."

Eurydice flung back her head and stared at him. She accepted the edge of the wicker arm-chair provisionally. Her eyes traveled relentlessly over Julian. She took in, and let him see that she took in, the full extent of his injury; but she spared him pity. She looked as if she were annoyed with him for having injuries.

"What I'm doing," she said, "is my business, not yours. It mightn't please Stella,—I must take the risk of that,—but if it saves her from you, it will be worth it."

Julian bowed; his eyes sparkled. An enemy struck him as preferable to a secret doubt.

"I didn't know," she said after a slight pause which Julian did nothing to relieve, "that you were as badly hurt as you appear to be. It makes it harder for me to talk to you as freely as I had intended."

"I assure you," said Julian, smiling, "that you need have no such scruples. My incapacities are local, and I can stand a long tongue as well as most men, even if I like it as little."

"I thought you would be insolent, and you are insolent," said Eurydice, with gloomy satisfaction. "That was one of the things I said to Stella."

Julian leaned forward, and for a moment his frosty, blue eyes softened as he looked at her.

"I admit I'm not very civil if I'm wrongly handled," he said in a more conciliatory tone. "Your manner was just a trifle unfortunate, Miss Eurydice; but I'd really like to be friends with you. I've not forgotten that Stella told me you were her 'special' sister. Shall we start quite afresh, and you just tell me as nicely as you know how what wrong you think I'm doing Stella?"

"I couldn't possibly be friends with you," Eurydice said coldly. "The sight of you disgusts me."

Julian lowered his eyes for a moment; when he raised them again the friendliness had gone. They were as hard as wind-swept seas.

"I suppose," he suggested quietly, "that you have some point to make. Isn't that a little off it?"

"I don't mean physically," said Eurydice, with a wave of her hand which included his crutches. "You can't help being a cripple. It is morally I am sick to think of you. Here you are, surrounded by luxury, waited on hand and foot by menials, and yet you can't face your hardships alone—you are so parasitic by nature that you have to drag down a girl like Stella by trading on her pity."

"It would," said Julian in a level voice, holding his temper down by an effort, "be rather difficult for even the cleverest parasite to drag your sister down in the sense of degrading her. Possibly you merely refer to her having consented to marry me?"

"No, I don't," said Eurydice, obstinately. "I call it dragging a person down if you make them sacrifice their integrity. Stella and I always agreed about that before. She cared more for the truth than anything. Now she doesn't; she cares more about hurting your feelings. I faced her with it last night, and she never even attempted to answer me. She only said, 'Oh, don't!' and covered her face with her hands."

"What unspeakable thing did you say to her?" asked Julian, savagely, "to make her do that?"

Ostrog, released from James, rejoined them, cowering down at his master's feet; he was aware that he was in the presence of an anger fiercer than his own.

"I didn't come here to mince matters," said Eurydice, defiantly. "If you want to know what I said to Stella, I asked her why she was going to marry a tyrannical, sterile cripple?"

For a moment Julian did not answer her; when he did, he had regained an even quieter manner than before.

"Very forcibly put," he said in a low voice; "and your sister covered her face with her hands and said, 'Oh, don't!'—you must have felt very proud of yourself."

"If you think I like hurting Stella, you're wrong," said Eurydice. "But I'd rather hurt her now than see her whole life twisted out of shape by giving way to a feeling that isn't the strongest feeling in her, or I wouldn't have come down here. But she didn't deny it."

"What didn't she deny?" asked Julian.

"What I came to tell you," said Eurydice. "The strongest feeling in Stella's life is her love for Mr. Travers, and she gave him up because she discovered that it was also the strongest thing in mine."

Julian flung back his head.

"Seriously, Miss Eurydice," he asked, "are you asking me to believe that your sister's in love with a town clerk?"

Eurydice flushed crimson under the undisguised amusement in Julian's eyes. He was amused, even though he had suddenly remembered that Mr. Travers was the name of the town clerk.

"Why not?" asked Eurydice, fiercely. "He's wonderful. He isn't like you—he works. He's like Napoleon, only he's always right, and *he* hasn't asked her to be his permanent trained nurse!"

Julian had a theory that you cannot swear at women; so he caught the words back, and wondered what would happen if Eurydice said anything worse.

"Don't you think," he said after a pause, "that if you insulted me once every five minutes, and then took a little rest, we might finish quicker? I will admit that there is no reason why Stella shouldn't be in love with Mr. Travers except the reason that I have for thinking she's in love with me."

"Well, she isn't," asserted Eurydice. "She's awfully fond of you, but it all started with her finding out that you were unhappier than she was. She came to you to get over what she felt about Mr. Travers, and to free him to care for me; but he doesn't. That's how I found out; I asked him."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Julian. "Poor old Travers!"

Eurydice ignored this flagrant impertinence. She repeated Mr. Travers's exact words: "I cared for your sister, Miss Waring; I am not a changeable man."

"But I notice," said Julian, politely, "that this profession of Mr. Travers's feelings which you succeeded in wringing from him does not include your sister's. I had already inferred from my slight knowledge of your sister that Mr. Travers was attached to her. The inference was easy."

"I hoped that myself," said Eurydice—"I mean, that she didn't care. I wrote and asked Cicely. She's my other sister; she hates me, but she's just. She doesn't know about you, of course. Would you like to see her letter?"

"It seems a fairly caddish thing to do, doesn't it?" asked Julian, pleasantly. "However, perhaps this is hardly the moment for being too particular. Yes, you can hand me over the letter." Julian

read:

My dear Eurydice:

You ask if I think Stella cared for Mr. Travers. I dislike this kind of question very much. However, as you seem to have some qualms of conscience at last, you may as well know that I think she did. She's never had anything for herself. You've always taken all there was to take, and I dare say she thought Mr. Travers ought to be included. She never told me that she cared for him, but of course even you must know that Stella wouldn't do such a thing as that. She spoke during her illness of him once in a way that made me suspect what she was feeling, added to which I was sure that she was struggling against great mental pain, as well as physical. She evidently wanted to get away from the town hall and leave Mr. Travers to you. You can draw your own inferences from these facts. Stella would rather be dragged to pieces by wild horses than tell you any more; so, if I were you, I would avoid asking her.

Your affectionate sister,
CICELY.

"You did ask her, of course," said Julian, handing Eurydice the letter; "and as we are both acting in a thoroughly underhand way, perhaps you will not mind repeating to me Stella's reply."

"At first she didn't answer at all," said Eurydice, slowly, "and then when I asked her again she said; 'I'm not going to tell you anything at all about Mr. Travers. I came here to tell you about Julian, only you won't listen to me.' Then," said Eurydice, "she cried."

"Please don't tell me any more," said Julian, quickly, shading his eyes with his hand. "I should be awfully obliged if you'd go. I think you've said enough."

Eurydice also thought that she had said enough; so she returned with the satisfaction of one who has accomplished a mission, on the rest of Stella's pound.

CHAPTER XXVI

This is going to be my last love-letter to you, Stella. I wonder if you will know it is a love-letter. It won't sound particularly like one. It's to tell you that I can't go through with our marriage. I can't give you my reasons, and I can't face you without giving them to you. You must try to take my word for it that I am doing what I think best for both of us.

You see, I trust you to do what I want, though I know I am acting in a way that you'll despise. If you will think of what it means for me to act in such a way, you'll realize that I am pretty certain that I am right.

You are the best friend I ever had, man or woman, and I know you value my friendship, so that it seems uncommonly mean to take it away from you; and yet I'm afraid I can't be satisfied with your friendship.

It would honestly make me happier to hear that you were married; but I couldn't meet you afterward, and if you don't marry, I couldn't let you alone.

You see, I tried that plan when I didn't know you'd let me do anything else, and it can't be said to have worked very well, can it? It would be quite impossible now. There are two things I'd like you to remember. One is, if you set out, as I think you did, to heal a broken man, you've succeeded, and nothing can take away from your success. You put in a new mainspring. I am going to work now. Some day I'll finish the book, but not yet. The second thing is something I want you to do for me. I know I have no right to ask you! I'm only appealing to your mercy. Will you let my mother help you a little? I know you won't let me, but you would have let me, Stella. Think what that means to me—to know that you would have taken my help, and that by freeing you I am also, in a sense, deserting you. If you still want to make a man happier who has only been a nuisance to you, you can't say I haven't shown you the way.

I should like to give you Ostrog, but I suppose he'd be out of place in a town hall.

I'm not going to ask you to forgive me; for I'm not really sorry for anything except that there wasn't more of it and I'm never going to forget anything.

Good-by.

Your lover,
JULIAN.

Stella was in the middle of ironing the curtains when she received Julian's letter. Everything else was ready for his visit except the curtains.

Mrs. Waring was dressed. It had taken several hours, a needle and cotton, and all the pins in the

house, and now she was sitting in a drawing-room which was tidier than any she had sat in since her early married life. She thought that it looked a little bare.

Professor Waring was in the Museum. He had become so restless after breakfast that it had seemed best to despatch him there, and retrieve him after Julian arrived.

Eurydice had not asked Mr. Travers for a morning off; she had merely conceded that she would allow Stella to arrange a subsequent meeting with Julian on Sunday, if it was really necessary.

Eurydice kissed Stella tenderly before she left the house to go to the town hall. She knew that she had saved her sister, but she foresaw for the victim of salvation a few painful moments. Even a kindly Providence may have its twinges of remorse.

Stella let the iron get cold while she was reading Julian's letter; but when she had finished it, she heated the iron again and went on with the curtains. They could not be hung up rough dried.

Mrs. Waring was relieved to hear that Julian was not coming. Stella told her at once, while she was slipping the rings on the curtains, which she had brought up-stairs. She added a little quickly, but in her ordinary voice:

"And we aren't going to be married, after all."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Waring, trying not to appear more relieved still. "Then there won't have to be any new arrangements. Marriage is very unreliable, too—it turns out so curiously unlike what it begins, and it even begins unlike what one had expected. I often wish there could be more mystical unions. I can't agree with dear Eurydice about the drawback of Julian's being rich. We are told that money is the root of all evil, but there is no doubt that it is more peaceful and refreshing to have it, as it were, growing under one's hand; and, after all, evil is only seeming. I think I'll just go up-stairs and take off these constricting clothes, unless, dear, you'd like me to help you in any way. You'll remember, won't you, that sensation is but the petal of a flower?"

Stella said that she thought, if she had the step-ladder, she would be all right.

The only moment of the day (it was curiously made up of moments prolonged to seem like years) when Stella wasn't sure whether she was really all right or not was when she heard Lady Verny's voice in the hall. Lady Verny's voice was singularly like Julian's.

Something happened to Stella's heart when she heard it; it had an impulse to get outside of her. She had to sit down on the top of the stairs until her heart had gone back where it belonged.

The drawing-room had gone to pieces again. The kitten's saucer was in the middle of the floor, and the plate-basket came half in and half out of the sofa-cover. Lady Verny was looking at it with fascinated eyes. She had never seen a plate-basket under a sofa-cover before. Mrs. Waring, exhausted by her hours of dressing, had gone to lie down. So there was only Stella. She came in a little waveringly, and looked at Lady Verny without speaking.

Lady Verny shot a quick, penetrating glance at her, and then held out her arms.

"My dear! what has he done? What has he done?" she murmured.

Stella led Lady Verny carefully away from the saucer of milk into the only safe arm-chair; then she sat down on a footstool at her feet.

"I thought," she said in a very quiet voice, "that you'd come, but I didn't think you'd come so soon. I don't know what he's done."

"It's all so extravagant and absurd," said Lady Verny, quickly, "and so utterly unlike Julian! I have never known him to alter an arrangement in his life, and as to breaking his word! I left him happier than I have ever seen him. He'd been telling me that you insisted on my staying with you after your marriage. I told him that I had always thought it a most out-of-place and unsuitable plan, and that he couldn't have two women in our respective positions in his house, and he laughed and said: 'Oh, yes, I can. Stella has informed me that marrying me isn't a position; it's to be looked on in the light of an intellectual convenience. You're to run the house, and she's to run me. I've quite fallen in with it.' I think that was the last thing he said, and when I came back, there was his astounding letter to say that your marriage was impossible, and that I was on no account to send him on your letters or to refer to you in mine.

"He gave me his banker's address, and said that he'd see me later on, and had started some intelligence work for the War Office. He was good enough to add that I might go and see you if I liked. I really think he must be mad, unless you can throw some light on the subject. A letter came from you after he had gone."

Stella, who had been without any color at all, suddenly flushed.

"Ah," she said, "I'm glad he didn't read that before he went! I mean, if he'd gone after reading it, I should have felt—" She put out her hands with a curious little helpless gesture, but she did not say what she would have felt.

"Can't you explain?" Lady Verny asked gravely. "Can't you explain *anything*? You *were* perfectly happy, weren't you? I haven't been a blind, meddling, incompetent old idiot, have I?"

Stella shook her head.

"When he left me," she said, "he gave me this." She took it out of her belt and handed it to Lady Verny; it was a check for two hundred pounds inclosed in a piece of paper, on which was written, "Dearest, please!" "I took it," said Stella.

Lady Verny was silent for a moment; then she said more gravely still:

"My dear, I think I ought to tell you something,—it is not fair not to let you have every possible indication that there is,—but the day after you left, while I was away, I hear from Thompson, who seemed to be extremely upset by her, that a lady *did* call to see Julian and she would not give her name. Thompson says he thinks she was a foreigner.

"I do not know what Julian may have told you about his life, but I myself am quite positive he would have asked no woman to marry him unless he felt himself free from any possible entanglement. Still, there it is: he went away after this person's visit."

For a moment it seemed to Stella that some inner citadel of security within her had collapsed. She knew so little about men; she had nothing but her instincts to guide her, and the memory of Eugénie Matisse's evil, laughing eyes. She covered her face with her hands and shut out every thought but Julian. It seemed to her as if she had never been so alone with him before, as if in some strange, hidden way she was plunging into the depths of his soul.

When she looked up she had regained her calm.

"No," she said; "I am quite sure of Julian. Perhaps some woman could make him feel shaken—shaken about its being right to marry me. I can believe that, if she was very cruel and clever and knew how to hurt him most; but there is nothing else, or Julian would have told me."

Lady Verny gave a long sigh of relief.

"That is what I think myself," she said; "but I couldn't have tried to persuade you of it. My dear, did Julian know that you had always loved him?"

Stella shook her head.

"I thought he knew all that mattered," she explained. "I didn't tell him anything else. You see, there was so very little time, and I was rather cowardly, perhaps. I didn't want him just *at once* to know that I had loved him before he even knew that I existed."

"I see, I see," said Lady Verny. "But would you mind his knowing now? He can't be allowed to behave in this extraordinary way, popping off like a conjurer without so much as leaving a decent address behind him. I intend to tell him precisely what I think of his behavior, and I hope that you will do the same."

Stella turned round to face Lady Verny.

"No," she said firmly; "neither of us must do that. I don't know why Julian has done this at all, but it is quite plain that he does not want to be interfered with. He wishes to act alone, and I think he must act alone. I shall not write to him or try to see him."

"But, my dear child," exclaimed Lady Verny, "how, if we enter into this dreadful conspiracy of silence, can anything come right?"

"I don't know," said Stella, quietly; "but Julian let it go wrong quite by himself, and I think it must come right, if it comes right at all, in the same way. If it didn't, he would distrust it. I shouldn't—I should be perfectly happy just to see him; but, then, you see, I *know* it's all right. Julian doesn't. Seeing me wouldn't make it so; it would simply make him give in, and go on distrusting. We couldn't live like that. You see, I don't *know* what has happened; but I do know what he wants, so I think I must do it."

"But you don't think this state of things is what he *wants*, do you?" Lady Verny demanded. "I may of course be mistaken, but up till now I have been able to judge fairly well what a man wanted of a woman when he couldn't take his eyes off her face."

"He wants me more than that," said Stella, proudly. "I think he wants me very nearly—not quite—as much as I want him. That's why I couldn't make him take less than he wanted. To take me and not trust me would be to take less. If we leave him quite alone for six months or a year, perhaps, he'll have stopped shutting his mind up against his feelings. It might be safer then to make an appeal to him; but I shouldn't like to appeal to him. Still, I don't say I won't do anything you think right, dear Lady Verny, if you want me to, to make him happier; only I must be *sure* that it will make him happier *first*. I know now that it wouldn't."

"You're the most extraordinary creature!" said Lady Verny. "Of course I always knew you were, but it's something to be so justified of one's instincts. I'm not sure that I sha'n't do precisely what you say—for quite different reasons. Julian will count on one of us disobeying his injunctions, and he'll be perfectly exasperated not to have news of you. Well, exasperation isn't going to do any man any harm; it'll end by jerking him into some common-sense question, if nothing else will."

Stella smiled, but she shook her head.

"Please don't hope," she said under her breath.

"There's one thing," Lady Verny said after a short pause, "that I do ask you to be sensible about. I

can't take you abroad, as there hardly seems at the present time any abroad to take you to, but I want you to come and live with me. I think, after all this, I really rather need a companion."

Stella hid her face in Lady Verny's lap.

"I can't," she whispered. "You're too like him."

Lady Verny said nothing at all for a moment; she looked about the room. It was clean; for a London room it was quite clean, and Stella thought she had hidden all the holes in the carpet. Lady Verny's ruthless, practised eye took the faded, shabby little room to pieces and reconstructed the rest of the dingy makeshift home from it. She knew that Stella's room would be the worst of all.

"My dear," she said at last, "you are so very nearly a member of my family that I think I may appeal to you about its honor. Are you going to live like this and not let me help you? You are not strong enough to work, and this folly of poor Julian's won't make you any stronger. Since you can't live with me, won't you accept a little of what is really yours?"

"Money?" asked Stella, looking up into Lady Verny's face. "I would if you weren't his mother, because I love you; but I can't now. You see, Julian's taken his honor away from me; he's left me only my own. I know he'll think me cruel, and I'll never return what I did take. He'll think perhaps I would use it, if I needed it, and that may make him happier; but I mustn't take any more. I must be cruel."

"Yes, you're very cruel," said Lady Verny, kissing her. "Well, I sha'n't bully you, for I wouldn't do it myself. It'll only make my heart ache in a new way, and really, I'm so used to its aching that I oughtn't to grumble at any fresh manifestation. As to Julian's heart, he's been so extraordinarily silly that only the fact that folly is a sign of love induces me to believe he's got one." She rose to her feet, with her arms still about Stella. "I'm simply not to mention you at all?" she asked.

Stella shook her head. She clung to Lady Verny speechlessly, but without tears.

"And when I see him next," Lady Verny asked a little dryly,— "and, presumably, he'll send for me in about a fortnight,—he'll say, 'Well, did she take the money'? What am I to answer to that?"

"Say," whispered Stella, "that she would have liked to take it, but she couldn't."

"I could make up something a great deal crueller to say than that," said Lady Verny, grimly. "However, I dare say you're right; it sounds so precisely like you that it's bound to hurt him more than any gibe."

Stella burst into tears.

"Oh, don't! don't!" she sobbed. "You must—you must be kind to him! I don't want anything in the world to hurt him."

"I know you don't," said Lady Verny, gently. "You little silly, I only wanted to make you cry. It'll be easier if you cry a little."

Stella cried more than ever then, because Lady Verny was so terribly like Julian.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was the hour of the day that Julian liked least. Until four o'clock in the afternoon his mind was protected by blinkers; he saw the road ahead of him, but the unmerciful vastness of the world was hidden from him. He was thankful that he could not see it, because it was possessed by Stella.

He could keep her out of his work; but there was no other subject she left untouched, no prospect that was not penetrated with her presence, no moment of his consciousness that she did not ruthlessly share.

He knew when he left her that he must be prepared for a sharp wrench and an unforgettable loss; what he had not foreseen was that the wrench would be continuous, and that he would be confronted by her presence at every turn.

Women's faces had haunted him before, and he had known what it was to be maddened by the sudden cessation of an intense relationship; but that was different. He could not remember Stella's face; he had no visual impression of her physical presence; he had simply lost the center of his thoughts. He felt as if he were living in a nightmare in which one tries to cross the ocean without a ticket.

He was perpetually starting lines of thought which were not destined to arrive. For the first few weeks it was almost easier; he felt the immediate relief which comes from all decisive action, and he was able to believe that he was angry with Stella. She had obeyed him implicitly by not writing, and his mother never mentioned her except for that worst moment of all when she gave him Stella's words, without comment. "She would like to take the money, but she cannot do it." This fed his anger.

"If I'd been that fellow Travers, I suppose she'd have taken it right enough," he said to himself, bitterly, and without the slightest conviction. He said nothing at all to his mother. Julian knew why Stella had not taken the money. It was because she had not consented to what he had done; he had forced her will. Of all her remembered words, the ones that remained most steadily in his mind were: "You are not only sacrificing yourself; you are sacrificing me. I give you no such right."

That was her infernal woman's casuistry. He had a perfect right to save her. He was doing what a man of honor ought to do, freeing a woman he loved from an incalculable burden. It was no use Stella's saying she ought to have a choice,—pity had loaded her dice,—and it was sheer nonsense to accuse him of pride. He hadn't any. He'd consented to take her till he found she had a decent marriage at her feet. He couldn't have done anything else then but give her up. The greatest scoundrel unhung wouldn't have done anything else. It relieved Julian to compare himself to this illusory and self-righteous personage.

As to facing Stella with it, which he supposed was her fantastic claim, it only showed what a child she was and how little Stella knew about the world or men. There were things you couldn't tell a woman. Stella was too confoundedly innocent.

Why should he put them both to a scene of absolute torture? Surely he had endured enough. He wasn't a coward, but to meet her eyes and go against her was rather more than he could undertake, knocked about as he was by every kind of beastly helplessness. He fell back upon self-pity as upon an ally; it helped him to obscure Stella's point of view. She ought to have realized what it would make him suffer; and she didn't, or she would have taken the money. He did well, he assured himself, to be angry; everything in life had failed him. Stella had failed him. But at this point his prevailing sanity shook him into laughter. He could still laugh at the idea of Stella's having failed him.

You do not fail people because you refuse to release them from acting up to the standard you had expected of them; you fail them when you expect less of them than they can give you. When Julian had faced this fact squarely he ceased to beat about the bush of his vanity. He confessed to himself that he was a coward not to have had it out with Stella. But he acquiesced in this spiritual defeat; he assured himself that there were situations in life when for the sake of what you loved you had to be a coward. Of course it was for Stella's sake; a man, he argued, doesn't lie down on a rack because he likes it.

He wished he could have gone on being angry with Stella, because when he stopped being angry he became frightened.

He was haunted by the fear of Stella's poverty. He didn't know anything about poverty except that it was disagreeable and a long way off. He had a general theory that people who were very poor were either used to it or might have helped it; but this general theory broke like a bubble at the touch of a special instance.

The worst of it was that Stella had not really told him anything about her life. He knew that her father was a well-known Egyptologist, that her mother had various odd ethical beliefs, and he knew all that he wanted to know about Eurydice. But of Stella's actual life, of its burdens and its cares, what had she told him? That there weren't any bells in the house and that the clocks didn't go.

This showed bad management and explained her unpunctuality, but it explained nothing more. It did not tell Julian how poor she was, or if she was properly looked after when she came home from work.

If she married Travers, she would have about nine hundred a year. Julian had made investigations into the income of metropolitan town clerks.

He supposed that people could just manage on this restricted sum, with economy; but there seemed no reliable statistics about the incomes of famous Egyptologists. Why hadn't he asked Stella? She ought to have told him without being asked. He tried being angry with her for her secretiveness, but it hurt him, so he gave it up. He knew she would have told him if he had asked her.

Julian made himself a nuisance at the office for which he worked on the subject of pay for woman clerks. It relieved him a little, but not much.

Logically he ought to have felt only his own pain, which he could have stood; he had made Stella safe by it. But he had deserted her; he couldn't get this out of his head. He kept saying to himself, "If she's in any trouble, why doesn't she go to Travers?" But he couldn't believe that Stella would ever go to Travers.

The lighting restrictions—it was November, and the evening thoroughfares were as dark as tunnels—unnerved him. Stella might get run over; she was certain to be hopelessly absent-minded in traffic, and would always be the last person to get on to a crowded bus.

It was six months since he had broken off their engagement. Julian did not think it could possibly remind Stella of him if he sent her, addressed by a shop assistant, a flash-light lamp for carrying about the streets. She wouldn't send back a thing as small as a torch-lamp, even if she did dislike anonymous presents. He was justified in this conjecture. Stella kept the lamp, but she never had a moment's doubt as to whom it came from; if it had had "Julian" engraved on it she couldn't have

been surer.

Julian always drove to his club at four o'clock, so that he didn't have to take his tea alone. He didn't wish to talk to anybody, but he liked being disturbed. Then he played bridge till dinner, dined at the club, and went back to his rooms, where he worked till midnight. This made everything quite possible except when he couldn't sleep.

He sat in an alcove, by a large, polished window of the club. It was still light enough to see the faces of the passers-by, to watch the motor-buses lurching through the traffic like steam tugs on a river, and the shadows creeping up from Westminster till they filled the green park with the chill gravity of evening.

A taxi drew up opposite to the club, and a man got out of it. There was nothing particularly noticeable about the man except that he was very neatly dressed. Julian took an instant and most unreasonable dislike to him. He said under his breath, "Why isn't the fellow in khaki?"

The man paid the driver what was presumably, from the scowl he received in return, his exact fare. Then he prepared to enter the club. He did not look in the least like any of the men who belonged to Julian's club. A moment later the waiter brought to Julian a card with "Mr. Leslie Travers" engraved upon it.

"Confound his impudence," was Julian's immediate thought. "Why on earth should I see the fellow?" Then he realized that he was being angry simply because Mr. Travers had probably seen Stella.

Julian instantly rejected the idea that Stella had sent Mr. Travers to see him; she wouldn't have done that. He wasn't in any way obliged to receive him; still, there was just the off chance that he might hear something about Stella if he did. Julian would rather have heard something about Stella from a condemned murderer; but as Providence had not provided him with this source of information, he decided to see the town clerk instead. You could say what you liked to a man if he happened to annoy you, and Julian rather hoped that Mr. Travers would give him this opportunity.

Mr. Travers entered briskly and without embarrassment. His official position had caused him to feel on rather more than an equality with the people he was likely to meet. He did not think that Sir Julian Verny was his equal.

Mr. Travers considered all members of the aristocracy loafers. Even when they worked, they did it, as it were, on their luck. They had had none of the inconveniences and resulting competence of having climbed from the bottom of the ladder to the top by their own unaided efforts.

There were three or four other men in the room when he entered it, but Mr. Travers picked out Julian in an instant. Their eyes met, and neither of them looked away from the other. Julian said stiffly: "Sit down, won't you? What will you take—a whisky and soda?"

"Thanks," said Mr. Travers, drawing up a chair opposite Julian and placing his hat and gloves carefully on the floor beside him. "I do not drink alcohol in between meals, but I should like a little aerated water."

Julian stared at him fixedly. This was the man Eurydice had compared with Napoleon, to the latter's disadvantage.

Mr. Travers refused a cigar, and sat in an arm-chair as if there were a desk in front of him. It annoyed Julian even to look at him.

"I have no doubt," said Mr. Travers, "that you are wondering why I ventured to ask you for this interview."

"I'm afraid I am, rather," Julian observed, with hostile politeness. "I know your name, of course."

"Exactly," said Mr. Travers, as if Julian had presented him with a valuable concession greatly to his advantage. "I had counted upon that fact to approach you directly and without correspondence. One should avoid black and white, I think, when it is possible, in dealing with personal matters."

"I am not aware," said Julian, coldly, "that there are any personal matters between us to discuss."

"I dare say not," replied Mr. Travers, blandly, placing the tips of his fingers slowly together. "You may have observed, Sir Julian, that coincidences bring very unlikely people together at times. I admit that they have done so in this instance."

"What for?" asked Julian, succinctly. He found that he disliked Mr. Travers quite as much as he intended to dislike him, and he despised him more.

"An injustice has been brought to my notice," said Mr. Travers, slowly and impressively. He was not in the least flurried by Julian's hostile manner, which he considered was due to an insufficient business education; it only made him more careful as to his own. "I could not overlook it, and as it directly concerns you, Sir Julian, I am prepared to make a statement to you on the subject."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you," said Julian; "but I trust you will make the statement as short and as little personal as possible."

"Speed," Mr. Travers said reprovingly, "is by no means an assistance in elucidating personal problems; and I may add, Sir Julian, that it is at least as painful for me as for you, to touch upon personal matters with a stranger."

"The fact remains," said Julian, impatiently, "that you're doing it, and I'm not. Go on!"

Mr. Travers frowned. Town clerks are not as a rule ordered to go on. Even their mayors treat them with municipal hesitancy. Still, he went on. Julian's eyes held him as in a vice.

"You have probably heard my name," Mr. Travers began, "from the elder Miss Waring." Julian nodded. "She was for two years and a half my secretary. I may say that she was the most efficient secretary I have ever had. There have been, I think, few instances in any office where the work between a man and woman was more impersonal or more satisfactory. It is due to the elder Miss Waring that I should tell you this. It was in fact entirely due to her, for I found myself unable to continue it. There was a lapse on my part. Miss Waring was consideration itself in her way of meeting this—er—lapse; but she unconditionally refused me."

Julian drew a quick breath, and turned his eyes away from Mr. Travers.

"At the same time," Mr. Travers continued, "she gave me to understand, in order, I fancy, to palliate my error of judgment, that her affections were engaged elsewhere."

Julian could not speak. His pride had him by the throat. He could not tell Mr. Travers to go on now, although he felt as if his life depended on it.

"There are one or two points which I put together, at a later date," Mr. Travers continued, after a slight pause, "and by which I was able to connect Miss Waring's statement with her subsequent actions. She is, if I may say so, a woman who acts logically. You were the man upon whom her affections were placed, Sir Julian, and that was her only reason for accepting your proposal of marriage."

Julian stared straight in front of him. It seemed to him as if he heard again the music of Chaliapine—the unconquerable music of souls that have outlasted their defeat. He lost the sound of Mr. Travers's punctilious, carefully lowered voice. When he heard it again, Mr. Travers was saying:

"It came to my knowledge through an interview with the younger Miss Waring, who has also become one of our staff, that she had regrettably misinformed you as to her sister's point of view. The younger Miss Waring acts at times impetuously and without judgment, but she had no intention whatever of harming her sister. She has been deeply anxious about her for the last few months, and she at length communicated her anxiety to me."

"Anxious," exclaimed Julian, sharply. "What the devil's she anxious about?"

"Her sister's state of health is not at all what it should be," Mr. Travers said gravely. "She looks weak and thin, and she occasionally forgets things. This is a most unusual and serious sign in a woman of her capacity."

"Damn her capacity!" said Julian savagely. "Why on earth couldn't you stop her working?"

"It is not in my province to stop people earning their daily bread," said Mr. Travers, coldly, "and I have never discussed this or any other private question with the elder Miss Waring since her return. When she came back to the town hall she refused to displace her sister, who had undertaken her former work and went into the surveyor's office."

"All right, all right," said Julian, hastily. "I dare say you couldn't have helped it; but how on earth did you find out if you've never talked to Miss Waring, what had happened?"

"I investigated the matter," said Mr. Travers, "with the younger Miss Waring. She confessed to me, under some slight pressure on my part, her very mistaken conclusions, and the action she had based upon them. I sent her at once, without mentioning what course of action I had decided to take myself, to her sister."

"You shouldn't have done that," said Julian, with the singular injustice Mr. Travers had previously noted and disliked in members of the upper classes. "There wasn't any need to give Eurydice away to her; I could have managed without that."

"You forget," said Mr. Travers, steadily, "the younger Miss Waring had forfeited her sister's confidence; it would have been impossible to avoid clearing up the situation by bringing all the facts to light. It will not, I feel sure, cause permanent ill feeling between the two sisters."

Julian gave a long, curious sigh. His relief was so intense that he could hardly believe in it; but he could believe, not without reluctance, in the hand that had set him free. It had taken a town clerk to show him where he stood.

"It would be difficult," he began—"By Jove! it's impossible to express thanks for this kind of thing! You won't expect it, perhaps, and I know of course, you didn't do it for me. For all that, I'm not ungrateful. I—well—I think you're more of a man than I am, Travers."

"Not at all, Sir Julian," said Mr. Travers, who privately felt surprised that there should be any doubt upon the matter. "Any one would have done precisely the same who had the good fortune to know the elder Miss Waring."

"Perhaps they would," said Julian, smiling, "or, you might add, the misfortune to come across the erratic proceedings of the younger one."

Mr. Travers looked graver still.

"There I cannot agree with you," he said quietly. "Perhaps I should have mentioned the matter before, but it scarcely seemed germane to the occasion; I am about to marry Miss Eurydice."

A vivid memory of Eurydice shot through Julian's mind. He saw her advancing down the grass path arrayed in the purple garment, with the scarlet hat and the dangling pomegranates; and the thought of her in conjunction with the town clerk was too much for him. Laughter seized him uncontrollably and shook him. He flung back his head and roared with laughter, and the graver and more disapproving Mr. Travers looked, the more helplessly and shamelessly Julian laughed.

"I'm most frightfully sorry," he gasped, "but I can't help it. Are you sure you're going to marry her? I mean, *must* you?"

Mr. Travers took his hat and gloves carefully in his hand.

"This is not a subject I care to discuss with you, Sir Julian," he said, with dignity, "nor is your tone a suitable one in which to refer to a lady. A man of my type does not shilly-shally on the question of matrimony; either he is affianced or he is *not*. I have already told you that I am. You may have some excuse for misjudging the younger Miss Waring; but there can be no excuse whatever for your flippant manner of referring to our marriage. It is most uncalled for. I might say offensive."

A spasm of returning laughter threatened Julian again, but he succeeded in controlling it.

"My dear Travers," he said, holding out his hand, "please don't go away with a grievance. I am thoroughly ashamed of myself as it is, and more grateful to you than I can possibly express. You'll forgive me for not getting up, won't you? And try to overlook my bad manners."

It was the first time during the interview that Mr. Travers realized Julian's disabilities, but they did not make him feel more lenient.

Mr. Travers liked an invalid to behave as if he were an invalid, and he thought that a man in Julian's position should not indulge in unseemly mirth.

"Pray don't get up," he said coldly. "I am bound to accept your apology, of course, though I must confess I think your laughter very ill timed."

Julian took this rebuke with extraordinary humility. He insisted on giving Mr. Travers an unnecessarily cordial hand-shake, and invited him to drop in again at some hour when he would have a drink.

Mr. Travers waived aside this suggestion, he did not wish to continue Julian's acquaintance and he disapproved of Julian's club. The large luxurious lounges, the silent obsequious servants and the sprinkling of indolent men swallowed up in soft arm-chairs, bore out Mr. Travers's opinion of the higher classes. They were drones—whether they were in khaki or not.

Mr. Travers sighed heavily as he crossed the threshold. "She was a perfect business woman," he said to himself bitterly, "nipped in the bud."

For the first time since Mr. Travers had known her, he found himself doubting the judgment of the elder Miss Waring.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Julian's first impulse was to drive to the town hall and carry Stella off. He was debarred from doing so only by a secret fear that she might refuse to come. He was a little afraid of this first meeting with Stella. She might haul him over the coals as much as she liked; but he wanted to stage-manage the position of the coals.

He decided after a few moments of reflection to ring her up on the telephone. The porter at the other end said that Miss Waring was still at work, and seemed to think that this settled the question of any further effort on his part. Julian speedily undeceived him. He used language to the town hall porter which would have lifted every separate hair from Mr. Travers's head. It did not have this effect upon the porter. He was a man who appreciated language, and he understood that there was an expert at the other end of the line. It even spurred him into a successful search for Stella.

"That you, Stella?" Julian asked, "Do you know who's speaking to you?"

There was a pause before she answered a little unsteadily:

"Yes, Julian."

"Well," said Julian, with an anxiety he could hardly keep out of his voice, "I want to see you for a few minutes if you can spare the time. Will you come to the Carlton to tea? I suppose I mustn't ask you to my rooms."

"I can't do either," replied Stella. "I'm too busy. Can't you wait till Saturday?"

"Impossible," Julian replied firmly. "May I come and fetch you in a taxi? I suppose you don't dine and sleep at the town hall, do you?"

"No, you mustn't do that," said Stella, quickly; "but you can come to the Cottage Dairy Company, which is just opposite here, if you like. I shall go there for a cup of tea at five o'clock. I can spare you half an hour, perhaps."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Julian, grimly. "I suppose I must be thankful for what I can get. Five sharp, then, at the what-you-may-call-'em."

Stella put up the receiver, but he thought before she did so that he heard her laugh.

Julian had never been to the Cottage Dairy Company before. It was a very nice, clean, useful little shop, and there was no necessity for him to take such an intense dislike to it. The rooms are usually full, and for reasons of space the tables are placed close together. The tables are marble-topped and generally clean. There is not more smell of inferior food than is customary in the cheaper restaurants of London.

Julian arrived at five minutes to the hour, and he turned the place literally upside down. It did no good, because Cottage Dairy Companies are democratic, and do not turn upside down to advantage.

He only succeeded in upsetting a manageress and several waitresses, and terrifying an unfortunate shop-girl who was occupying the only table in the room at which Julian could consent to sit by standing over her until she had finished her tea, half of which she left in consequence.

Stella was ten minutes late; by the time she arrived Julian had driven away the shop-girl, had the table cleared, and frozen every one in the neighborhood who cast longing glances at the empty place in front of him. He was consumed with fury at the thought that in all probability Stella had had two meals a day for six months in what he most unfairly characterized as a "loathsome, stinking hole."

As a matter of fact, Stella had not been able to afford the Cottage Dairy Company. She had had her meals at the People's Restaurant, which is a little cheaper and not quite so nice.

Julian's anger failed him when he saw Stella's face. She looked ill. He could not speak at first, and Stella made no attempt whatever to help him. She merely dropped her umbrella at his feet, sat down opposite him, and trembled.

"How dare you come to this infernal place?" Julian asked her at last, with readjusted annoyance, "and why didn't you tell me you were ill?" Then he ordered tea from a hovering waitress. "If you have anything decent to eat, you can bring it," he said savagely.

Stella smiled deprecatingly at the outraged waitress before she answered Julian.

"I'm not ill," she said gently, "and I couldn't very well tell you anything, could I, when I didn't know where you were?"

"Of course, if you make a point of eating and drinking poison," said Julian, bitterly, "you aren't likely to be very well. I suppose you could have told my mother, but no doubt that didn't occur to you. You simply wished—" He stopped abruptly at the approach of the waitress.

Stella did not try to pour out the tea; she showed no proper spirit under Julian's unjust remarks. She only put her elbows on the table and looked at him.

"There, drink that," he said, "if you can. It's the last chance you'll get of this particular brand. They call it China, and it looks like dust out of a rubbish-heap. I don't know what you call that thing on the plate in front of you, but I suppose it's meant to eat. So you may as well try to eat it."

"Food," said Stella, with the ghost of her old fugitive smile, "isn't everything, Julian."

"It's all you'll get me to talk about in a place like this," said Julian, firmly. "I wonder you didn't suggest our meeting in one of those shelters on the Strand! Do you realize that there's a Hindu two yards to your right, a family of Belgian refugees behind us, and the most indescribable women hemming us in on every side? How can you expect us to talk here?"

"But you and I are here," said Stella, quietly. "Julian, how could you believe what Eurydice told you?"

Julian lowered his eyes.

"Must I tell you now?" he asked gravely. "I'd rather not."

"Yes, I think you must," said Stella, relentlessly, "You needn't tell me much, but you must say enough for me to go on with. If you don't, I can't talk at all; I can only be afraid."

Julian kept his eyes on a tea-stained spot of marble. There was no confidence in his voice now; it was not even very steady as he answered her.

"I made a mistake," he said. "You weren't there. I wanted you to have everything there was. I can't explain. I ought to have let you choose, but if you'd chosen wrong I should have felt such a

cur. I can't say any more here. Please, Stella!"

She was quick to let him off.

"I oughtn't to have left you so soon," she said penitently; "that was *quite* my fault."

Julian made no answer. He drew an imaginary pattern on the table with a fork; he couldn't think why they'd given him a fork unless it was a prevision that he would need something to fidget with. It helped him to recover his assurance.

"I suppose you know," he said reflectively, contemplating the unsuspecting Hindu on his right, "that I'm never going to let you out of my sight again?"

"I dare say I shall like being alone sometimes," replied Stella; "but I don't want you to go calmly off and arrange things that break us both to pieces. I'd never see you again rather than stand that!"

"Now," said Julian, "you've roused the Belgians; they're awfully interested. I'll never go off again, though you're not very accurate; it was you that went off first. I only arranged things, badly I admit, when I was left alone. I wasn't so awfully calm. As far as that goes, I've been calmer than I am now. Have you had enough tea?"

"You know it's you I mind about," said Stella, under her breath.

"You mustn't say that kind of thing in a tea-shop," said Julian, severely. "You're very nearly crying, and though I'd simply love to have you cry, I believe it's against the regulations. And there's a fat lady oozing parcels to my left who thinks it's all my fault, and wants to tell me so."

"I'm not crying," said Stella, fiercely. "I'm going back to work. I don't believe you care about anything but teasing."

"I don't believe I do," agreed Julian, with twinkling eyes; "but I haven't teased any one for six months, you know, Stella. How much may I tip the waitress? Let's make it something handsome; I've enjoyed my tea. I'll take you across to the town hall."

"It's only just the other side of the road," Stella objected.

"Still, I'd like you to get into this taxi," said Julian, hailing one from the door.

Stella looked at him searchingly. "I should be really angry if you tried to carry me off," she warned him.

"My dear Stella," said Julian, meeting her eyes imperturbably, "I haven't the nerve to try such an experiment. I'm far too much afraid of you. Get in, won't you? The man'll give me a hand." He turned to the driver. "Drive wherever you like for a quarter of an hour," he explained, "and then stop at the town hall."

The taxi swung into the darkened thoroughfare, and Julian caught Stella in his arms and kissed her as if he could never let her go.

"Not very clever of you," he murmured, "not to guess why I wanted a taxi."



"Not very clever of you," he murmured, "not to guess why I wanted a taxi"

Stella clung to him speechlessly. She did not know what to say; she only knew that he was there and that the desperate loneliness of the empty world was gone.

She wanted to speak of the things that she believed in, she wanted not to forget to reassure him, in this great subdual of her heart; but she did not have to make the effort. It was Julian who spoke of these things first.

He spoke hurriedly, with little pauses for breath, as if he were running.

"I know now," he said, "I've been a fool and worse. I saw it as soon as I looked at you; it broke me all up. How could I tell you'd mind losing a man like me? I'm glad it's dark; I'm glad you can't see me. I'm ashamed. Stella, the fact is, I gave you up because I couldn't stick it; my nerve gave way."

"I shouldn't have left you so soon; it was all my fault for leaving you," Stella murmured.

"That rather gives the show away, doesn't it," asked Julian "not to be able to stand being left?"

"You weren't thinking only of yourself," Stella urged defensively.

"Wasn't I?" said Julian. "I kept telling myself I was behaving decently when I was only being grand. Isn't that thinking of yourself?"

"But on the downs," urged Stella, "you weren't like that, darling."

"You were on the downs, remember," said Julian. "I got your point of view then—to give in, anyhow, to love. It wasn't easy, but it made it more possible that if I didn't marry you, you only had hard work and a dull life. It seemed different when I heard about that fellow Travers. You see, that cut me like a knife. I kept thinking—well, you know what a man like me keeps thinking—at least I don't know that you do. It was my business to fight it through alone."

"No it isn't," Stella protested quickly. "We haven't businesses that aren't each other's."

"Well," admitted Julian, "I couldn't bear thinking I'd cheated you out of my own values; so I let yours slide. I knew, if I gave you the choice, you'd stick to me; but I couldn't trust you not to make a mistake. That's where my nerve broke down."

"Ah, but I didn't know," whispered Stella; "I didn't know enough how to show you I loved you. If you'd seen, you wouldn't have broken down. I was afraid to try. Now I can. All these six months have eaten up my not knowing how." She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. "You see, I do know how!"

He held her close, without speaking; then he murmured: "And knowing how doesn't make you afraid?"

"It's the only thing that doesn't," said Stella, lifting her eyes to his.

The taxi stopped before the door of the town hall.

"And have I got to let you go now?" Julian asked gently.

"I shall never really go," Stella explained; "but you can let me get out and tidy up the surveyor's papers, and then be free for you to-morrow."

Julian opened the door for her. She stood for a moment under the arc of light beneath the lamp-post looking back at him.

The love between them held them like a cord. Julian had never felt so little aware of his helplessness; but he wondered, as he gazed into her eyes, if Stella realized the bitterness of all that they had lost.

She neither stirred nor spoke. She held his eyes without faltering; she gave him back knowledge for knowledge, love for love; and still there was no bitterness. At last he knew that she had seen all that was in his heart; and then for a moment, if but for a moment, Julian forgot what they had lost; he remembered only what they had found.

CHAPTER XXIX

When Stella reëntered the town hall the porter was still sitting at his desk near the door, but every one else had gone.

"Oh, I hope I have not kept you, Humphreys," Stella said apologetically. "I had no idea it was so late. I'll be as quick as I can."

"Mr. Travers is still in 'is room," Humphreys admitted gloomily; "'e came back an hour ago. Gawd knows how long 'e'll be at it. There's been a tri-bunal and wot not this afternoon. Talk abaht mud in the trenches! 'Alf the gutters of Lunnon 'as been dribbling through this 'ere 'all. I've asked for an extra char, an', what's more, I mean ter 'ave 'er. War or no war, I'll 'ave a woman under me."

The surveyor's office was empty. Stella's papers were just as she had left them, but her whole life lay in between.

She would never copy the surveyor's plans again or do the office accounts or look through the correspondence. She would not hover in the drafty passages and listen to the grumbling Humphreys nor stand outside glass doors and help bewildered fellow-clerks over their blunders before they went in to face a merciless authority.

She would probably never see green baize again. She tried to fix her mind on the accounts, but through the columns of figures ran the wind from the downs. The half-darkened, empty room filled itself with Amberley.

She tried to imagine her life with Julian. It would be unlike anything she had lived before; it would require of her all she had to give. The town hall had not done this. It had taken the outer surfaces of her mind, her time, and much of her youth: but her inner self had been free.

It was not free now; it had entered that dual communion of love. It was one with Julian, and yet not one; because she knew that though he filled every entrance to her heart, though her mind companioned his mind, and her life rested on him, yet she was still herself. She would be for Julian the Stella of Amberley, but she would not cease to be the Stella of the town hall.

She would not part with her experiences; poverty, drudgery, the endless petty readjustments to the ways of others should belong to her as much as joy. Privilege should neither hold nor enchain her, and she would never let anything go.

She would keep her people, her old interests, Mr. Travers, even the surveyor, if he wished to be kept. Stella mightn't be able to impart them to Julian, but she could give him all he wanted and still have something to spare. Julian himself would profit by her alien interests; he would get tired of a woman who hadn't anything to spare. Stella was perfectly happy, but she could still see over the verge of her happiness. Joy had come to her with a shock of surprise which would have puzzled Julian. He had the strength of attack, which is always startled when it cannot overcome opposition. Julian never coöperated with destiny, he always fought it. Sometimes he overcame it; but when it overcame him, he could not resign himself to defeat. Stella took unhappiness more easily; in her heart, even now, she believed in it. She believed that the balance of life is against joy, that destiny and fate prey upon it, overcloud it, and sometimes destroy it; and she believed that human beings can readjust this balance. She believed in a success which is independent of life, an invisible and permanent success.

She did not think of this for herself, it never occurred to her that she possessed it; but she believed in its existence, and she wanted it, and sought for it, in every soul she knew. She wanted it most for Julian, but she did not think it could be got for him to-morrow. She did not expect to get it for him, though she would have given all she possessed to help him to obtain it.

She only hoped that he would win it for himself, and that she would not be a hindrance to his winning it; that was as far as Stella's hopes carried her before she returned to the accounts.

When she had finished the accounts, she took them to the town clerk's room.

Mr. Travers was sitting as usual at his desk, but he did not appear to be writing. Perhaps he was also doing his accounts.

"I'm afraid," Stella said apologetically, "I'm very late with these papers, Mr. Travers. I was detained longer than I had intended."

"I expected you to be late," said Mr. Travers, quietly. "In fact, I should not have been surprised if you had not returned at all. It occurred to me that you might not come back to the town hall again."

"I had to finish my work," said Stella, gently, "and I wanted to see you; but after this, if you and Mr. Upjohn can find some one else to take my place, I shall not return. I know I ought not to leave you in the lurch like this without proper notice; I should have liked to have given you at least another week to find some one to take my place, but I am afraid I must leave at once."

"I think I can make a temporary arrangement to tide us over," Mr. Travers replied thoughtfully. "Your leaving us was bound to be a loss in any case."

They were silent for a moment. Mr. Travers still sat at his desk, and Stella stood beside him with the papers in her hand.

"I hope you will not think I took too much upon myself, Miss Waring," said Mr. Travers at last, "in going to see Sir Julian Verny this afternoon. It seemed to me a man's job, if I may say so, and not a woman's. I thought your sister had done enough in letting you know herself how gravely she had misunderstood us all; and if I had notified you of my intention, I feared that you might not have seen your way to ratify it."

"I am very glad indeed you spared Eurydice," said Stella; "I would not have let her go to Julian. I would have gone myself; but I am glad I did not have to do it. You spared us both."

"That," said Mr. Travers, "was what I had intended."

Stella put the papers on the desk; then she said hesitatingly:

"Mr. Travers, may I ask you something?"

"Yes, Miss Waring; I am always at your disposal," replied Mr. Travers, clearing his throat. "You are not an exacting questioner."

"I hope you will not think me so," said Stella, gently; "but are you sure—will you be quite happy with Eurydice?"

Mr. Travers met her eyes. She did not think she had ever seen him look as he looked now; his eyes were off their guard. It was perhaps the only time in his life when Mr. Travers wished any one to know exactly what he felt.

"You will remember, Miss Waring," he said, "that I told you once before that I am a lonely man. I have not won affection from people. I think I have obtained your sister's regard, and I am proud to have done so. I suppose, too, that all men have the desire to protect some one. I do not know much about feelings in general, but I should suppose that the desire for protection *is* a masculine instinct?"

Stella nodded. She wished to give Mr. Travers all the instincts that he wanted, and if he preferred to think them solely masculine, she had not the least objection.

"I see that you agree with me," said Mr. Travers, with satisfaction, "and you will therefore be able to understand my point of view. I have a very real regard for Miss Eurydice. Her work is of great, though unequal, value, and I should like to see her happy and comfortable and, if I may say so, safe. I do not think that the life of women who work in public offices, unless they are peculiarly gifted by nature, is safe. I may be old-fashioned, Miss Waring, but I still maintain that woman's sphere is the home."

"I am glad you feel like that about Eurydice," said Stella, softly.

She paused for a moment. She wanted to thank him, but she knew that she must thank him only for some little thing. The greater things she must leave entirely alone. He trusted her to do this; he was trusting her with all he had. She must protect him from her gratitude.

"Before I leave the town hall, Mr. Travers," she said, "I want to thank you for what I have learned here. That is really one of the reasons I came back to-night. You have been such a help to me as a business woman. I am not going to give it up. I shall keep all that you have taught me, and take it into my new life with me. It has been an education to work in your office under your rule."

"I am glad you have felt it to be so, Miss Waring," said Mr. Travers, with grave satisfaction. "I have devoted what talents I possess to the running of this town hall, under the auspices of the mayor, of course. I am very much gratified if my methods have been of any service to you. Our relationship has certainly not been a one-sided benefit. I took occasion to say to Sir Julian this afternoon that I had never had a more efficient secretary."

"I am so glad you told Julian that," said Stella, smiling. "My work with him was only make-believe."

"There is a leniency about your dealings with people," Mr. Travers continued, ignoring her

reference to Julian, "which sometimes needs restraint, Miss Waring. The world, I fear, cannot be run upon lenient principles. Nevertheless, in some cases I am not prepared to say that your system has not got merits of its own. I recognize that personal leniency modifies certain problems even of business life. I should be apprehensive of seeing it carried too far; but up to a certain point," said Mr. Travers, rising to his feet and holding out his hand to Stella to close the interview, "I am prepared to accept your theory."

THE END

[Transcriber's Note: One illustration missing. Extensive research could not find another source.]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECOND FIDDLE ***

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