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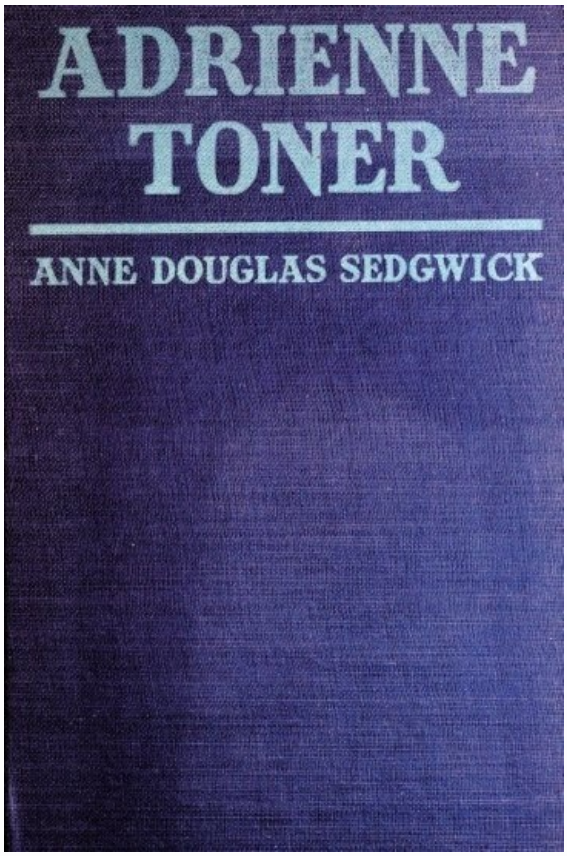

ADRIENNE TONER

ADRIENNE TONER
A Novel

BY
ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK
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“FRANKLIN KANE,” “THE ENCOUNTER,” ETC.

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ADRIENNE TONER
PART I

CHAPTER I

“Come down to Coldbrooks next week-end, will you, Roger?” said Barney Chadwick. He had been wandering around the room, pausing once to glance at the César Franck on the piano and once at the window to look down at the Thames, and his voice now, though desultory in intention, betrayed to his friend preoccupation and even anxiety. “There is going to be an interesting girl with us: American; very original and charming.”

Roger Oldmeadow sat at his writing-bureau in the window, and his high dark head was silhouetted against the sky. It had power and even beauty, with moments of brooding melancholy; but the type to which it most conformed was that of the clever, cantankerous London bachelor; and if he sometimes looked what he was, the scholar who had taken a double first at Balliol and gave brain and sinew to an eminent review, he looked more often what he was not, a caustic, cautious solicitor, clean-shaved and meticulously neat, with the crisp bow at his collar, single eyeglass, and thin, wry smile.

There was a cogitative kindness in his eyes and a latent irony on his lips as he now scrutinized Barney Chadwick, who had come finally to lean against the mantelpiece, and it was difficult before Roger Oldmeadow’s gaze at such moments not to feel that you were giving yourself away. This was evidently what Barney was trying not to feel, or, at all events, not to show. He tapped his cigarette-end, fixing his eyes upon it and frowning a little. He had ruffled his brown hair with the nervous hand passed through it during his ramble, but ruffled or sleek Barney could never look anything but perfection, just as, whether he smiled or frowned, he could never look anything but charming. In his spring-tide grey, with a streak of white inside his waistcoat and a tie of petunia silk that matched his socks, he was a pleasant figure of fashion; and he was more than that; more than the mere London youth of 1913, who danced the tango and cultivated Post-Impressionism and the Russian ballet. He was perhaps not much more; but his difference, if slight, made him noticeable. It came back, no doubt, to the fact of charm. He was radiant yet reserved; confident yet shy. He had a slight stammer, and his smile seemed to ask you to help him out. His boyhood, at twenty-nine, still survived in his narrow face, clumsy in feature and delicate in contour, with long jaw, high temples and brown eyes, half sweet, half sleepy. The red came easily to his brown cheek, and he had the sensitive, stubborn lips of the little boy at the preparatory school whom Oldmeadow had met and befriended now many years ago.

In Oldmeadow’s eyes he had always remained the “little Barney” he had then christened him—even Barney’s

mother had almost forgotten that his real name was Eustace—and he could not but know that Barney depended upon him more than upon anyone in the world. To Barney his negations were more potent than other people's affirmations, and though he had sometimes said indignantly, "You leave one nothing to agree about, Roger, except Plato and Church-music," he was never really happy or secure in his rebellions from what he felt or suspected to be Oldmeadow's tastes and judgments. Oldmeadow had seen him through many admirations, not only for books and pictures, but for original girls. Barney thought that he liked the unusual. He was a devotee of the ballet, and had in his rooms cushions and curtains from the Omega shop and a drawing by Wyndham Lewis. But Oldmeadow knew that he really preferred the photograph of a Burne-Jones, a survival from Oxford days, that still bravely, and irrelevantly, hung opposite it, and he waited to see the Wyndham Lewis replaced by a later portent. Barney could remain stubbornly faithful to old devotions, but he was easily drawn into new orbits; and it was a new star, evidently, that he had come to describe and justify.

"What have I to do with charming American girls?" Oldmeadow inquired, turning his eyes on the blurred prospect of factory-chimneys and warehouses that the farther waterside of Chelsea affords. One had to go to the window and look out to see the grey and silver river flowing, in the placidity that revealed so little power. Oldmeadow lived in a flat on the Embankment; but he was not an admirer of Chelsea, just as he was not an admirer of Whistler nor—and Barney had always suspected it—of Burne-Jones. His flat gave him, at a reasonable cost, fresh air, boiling-hot water and a walk in Battersea Park; these, with his piano, were his fundamental needs; though he owned, for the mean little stream it was, that the Thames could look pretty enough by morning sunlight and—like any river—magical under stars. After Plato and Bach, Oldmeadow's passions were the rivers of France.

"She'll have something to do with you," said Barney, and he seemed pleased with the retort. "I met her at the Lumleys. They think her the marvel of the age."

"Well, that doesn't endear her to me," said Oldmeadow. "And I don't like Americans."

"Come, you're not quite so hide-bound as all that," said Barney, vexed. "What about Mrs. Aldesey? I've heard you say she's the most charming woman you know."

"Except Nancy," Oldmeadow amended.

"No one could call Nancy a charming woman," said Barney, looking a little more vexed. "She's a dear, of course; but she's a mere girl. What do you know about Americans, anyway—except Mrs. Aldesey?"

"What she tells me about them—the ones she doesn't know," said Oldmeadow, leaning back in his chair with a laugh. "But I own that I'm merely prejudiced. Tell me about your young lady, and why you want her to have something to do with me. Is she a reformer of some sort?"

"She's a wonderful person, really," said Barney, availing himself with eagerness of his opportunity. "Not a reformer. Only a sort of mixture of saint and fairy-princess. She cured Charlie Lumley of insomnia, three years ago, at Saint Moritz. Nothing psychic or theatrical, you know. Just sat by him and smiled—she's a most extraordinary smile—and laid her hand on his head. He'd not slept for nights and went off like a lamb. Lady Lumley almost cries when she tells about it. They thought Charlie might lose his mind if he went on not sleeping."

"My word! She's a Christian Science lady? A medium? What?"

"Call her what you like. You'll see. She does believe in spiritual forces. It's not only that. She's quite lovely. In every way. Nancy and Meg will worship her. The Lumley girls do."

Oldmeadow's thoughts were already dwelling in rueful surmise on Nancy. He had always thought her the nicest young creature he had ever known, nicer even than Barney; and he had always wanted them to marry. She was Barney's second cousin, and she and her mother lived near the Chadwicks in Gloucestershire.

"Oh, Nancy will worship her, will she? She must be all right, then. What's her name?" he asked.

Barney had given up trying to be desultory, and his conscious firmness was now not lost upon his friend as he answered, stammering a little, "Adrienne. Adrienne Toner."

"Why Adrienne?" Oldmeadow mildly inquired. "Has she French blood?"

"Not that I know of. It's a pretty name, I think, Adrienne. One hears more inane names given to girls every day. Her mother loved France—just as you do, Roger. Adrienne was born in Paris, I think."

"Oh, a very pretty name," said Oldmeadow, noting Barney's already familiar use of it. "Though it sounds more like an actress's than a saint's."

"There was something dramatic about the mother, I fancy," said Barney, sustained, evidently, by his own detachment. "A romantic, rather absurd, but very loveable person. Adrienne worshipped her and, naturally, can't see the absurdity. She died out in California. On a boat," said Barney stammering again, over the *b*.

"On a boat?"

"Yes. Awfully funny. But touching, too. That's what she wanted, when she died: the sea and sky about her. They carried her on her yacht—doctors, nurses, all the retinue—and sailed far out from shore. It's beautiful, too, in a way you know, to be able to do that sort of thing quite simply and unself-consciously. Adrienne sat beside her, and they smiled at each other and held hands until the end."

Oldmeadow played with his penholder. He was disconcerted; and most of all by the derivative emotion in Barney's voice. They had gone far, then, already, the young people. Nancy could have not the ghost of a chance. And the nature of what touched Barney left him singularly dry. He was unable to credit so much simplicity or unself-consciousness. He coughed shortly, and after a decently respectful interval inquired: "Is Miss Toner very wealthy?"

"Yes, very," said Barney, relapsing now into a slight sulkiness. "At least, perhaps not very, as rich Americans go. She gave away a lot of her fortune, I know, when her mother died. She founded a place for children—a convalescent home, or crèche—out in California. And she did something in Chicago, too."

And Miss Toner had evidently done something in London at the Lumleys'. It couldn't be helped about Nancy, and if the American girl was pretty and, for all her nonsense, well-bred, it might not be a bad thing, since there was so much money. The Chadwicks were not at all well off, and Coldbrooks was only kept going by Mrs. Chadwick's economies and Barney's labours at his uncle's stock-broking firm in the city. Oldmeadow could see Eleanor Chadwick's so ingenuous yet so practical eye fixed on Miss Toner's gold, and he, too, could fix his. Miss Toner sounded benevolent, and it was probable that her presence as mistress of Coldbrooks would be of benefit to all Barney's relatives. All the same, she sounded as irrelevant in his life as the Wyndham Lewis.

“Adrienne Toner,” he heard himself repeating aloud, for he had a trick, caught, no doubt, from his long loneliness, of relapsing into absent-minded and audible meditations. The cadence of it worried him. It was an absurd name. “You know each other pretty well already, it seems,” he said.

“Yes; it’s extraordinary how one seems to know her. One doesn’t have any formalities to get through with her, as it were,” said Barney. “Either you are there, or you are not there.”

“Either on the yacht, or not on the yacht, eh?” Oldmeadow reached out for his pipe.

“Put it like that if you choose. It’s awfully jolly to be on the yacht, I can tell you. It *is* like a voyage, a great adventure, to know her.”

“And what’s it like to be off the yacht? Suppose I’m not there? Suppose she doesn’t like me?” Oldmeadow suggested. “What am I to talk to her about—of course I’ll come, if you really want me. But she frightens me a little, I confess. I’m not an adventurous person.”

“But neither am I, you know!” Barney exclaimed, “and that’s just what she does to you: makes you adventurous. She’ll be immensely interested in you, of course. You can talk to her about anything. It was down at a week-end at the Lumleys’ I first met her, and there were some tremendous big-wigs there, political, you know, and literary, and all that sort of thing; and she had them all around her. She’d have frightened me, too, if I hadn’t seen at once that she took to me and wouldn’t mind my being just ordinary. She likes everybody; that’s just it. She takes to everybody, big and little. She’s just like sunshine,” Barney stammered a little over his *s*’s. “That’s what she makes one think of straight off; shining on everything.”

“On the clean and the unclean. I see,” said Oldmeadow. “I feel it in my bones that I shall come into the unclean category with her. But it’ll do me the more good to have her shine on me.”

CHAPTER II

Roger Oldmeadow went to have tea with Mrs. Aldesey next afternoon. She was, after the Chadwicks, his nearest friend, and his relation to the Chadwicks was one of affection rather than affinity. They had been extraordinarily kind to him since the time that he had befriended Barney at the preparatory school, hiding, under his grim jocularities, the bewilderment of a boy’s first great bereavement. His love for his mother had been an idolatry, and his childhood had been haunted by her ill-health. She died when he was thirteen, and in some ways he knew that, even now, he had never got over it. His unfortunate and frustrated love-affair in early manhood had been, when all was said and done, a trivial grief compared to it. Coldbrooks had become, after that, his only home, for he had lost his father as a very little boy, and the whole family had left the country parsonage and been thrown on the mercies of an uncle and aunt who lived in a grim provincial town. Oldmeadow’s most vivid impression of home was the high back bedroom where the worn carpet was cold to the feet and the fire a sulky spot of red, and the windows looked out over smoky chimney-pots. Here his stricken mother lay in bed with her cherished cat beside her and read aloud to him. There was always a difficulty about feeding poor Effie, Aunt Aggie declaring that cats should live below stairs and on mice; and Roger, at midday dinner, became adroit at slipping bits of meat from his plate into a paper held in his lap and carried triumphantly to his mother’s room afterwards. “Oh, darling, you *oughtn’t* to,” she would say with her loving, girlish smile, and he would reply, “But I went without, Mummy; so it’s quite all right.” His two little sisters were kept in the nursery, as they were noisy, high-spirited children, and tired their mother too much. Roger was her companion, her comrade; her only comrade in the world, really, beside Effie. It had been Mrs. Chadwick who had saved Effie from the lethal chamber after her mistress’s death. Roger never spoke about his mother, but he did speak about Effie when she was thus threatened, and he had never forgotten, never, never, Mrs. Chadwick’s eager cry of, “But bring her here, my dear Roger. I *like* idle cats! Bring her here, and I promise you that we’ll make her happy. Animals are *so* happy at Coldbrooks.” To see Effie cherished, petted, occupying the best chairs during all the years that followed, had been to see his mother, in this flickering little ghost, remembered in the only way he could have borne to see her explicitly remembered, and it was because of Effie that he had most deeply loved Coldbrooks. It remained always his refuge during a cheerless and harassed youth, when, with his two forceful, black-browed sisters to settle in life, he had felt himself pant and strain under the harness. He was fonder of them than they of him, for they were hard, cheerful young women, inheriting harshness of feature and manner from their father, with their father’s black eyes. It was from his mother that Oldmeadow had his melancholy blue ones, and he had never again met his mother’s tenderness.

Both sisters were now settled, one in India and one, very prosperously, in London; but he seldom turned for tea into Cadogan Gardens and Trixie’s brisk Chippendale drawing-room; though Cadogan Gardens was obviously more convenient than Somer’s Place, where, on the other side of the park, Mrs. Aldesey lived. He had whims, and did not know whether it was because he more disliked her husband or her butler that he went so seldom to see Trixie. Her husband was jovial and familiar, and the butler had a face like a rancid ham and a surreptitious manner. One had always to be encountered at the door, and the other was too often in the drawing-room, and Trixie was vexatiously satisfied with both; Trixie also had four turbulent, intelligent children, in whom complacent parental theories of uncontrol manifested themselves unpleasantly, and altogether she was too much hedged in by obstacles to be tempting; even had she been tempting in herself. Intercourse with Trixie, when it did take place, consisted usually of hard-hearted banter. She bantered him a great deal about Mrs. Aldesey, who, she averred, snubbed her. Not that Trixie minded being snubbed by anybody.

It was a pleasant walk across the park on this spring day when the crocuses were fully out in the grass, white, purple and gold, and the trees just scantly stitched with green, and, as always, it was with a slight elation that he approached his friend. However dull or jaded oneself or the day, the thought of her cheered one as did the thought of tea. She made him think of her own China tea. She suggested delicate ceremoniousness. Though familiar, there was always an aroma of unexpectedness about her; a slight, sweet shock of oddity and surprise.

Mrs. Aldesey was unlike the traditional London American. She was neither rich nor beautiful nor noticeably well-dressed. One became gradually aware, after some time spent in her company, that her clothes, soft-tinted and silken, were pleasing, as were her other appurtenances; the narrow front of her little house, painted freshly in white

and green and barred by boxes of yellow wallflower; the serenely unfashionable water-colours of Italy, painted by her mother, on the staircase; and her drawing-room, grey-green and primrose-yellow, with eighteenth-century fans, of which she had a collection, displayed in cabinets, and good old glass.

Mrs. Aldesey herself, behind her tea-table, very faded, very thin, with what the French term a *souffreteux* little face—an air of just not having taken drugs to make her sleep, but of having certainly taken tabloids to make her digest—seemed already to belong to a passing order of things; an order still sustained, if lightly, by stays, and keeping a prayer-book as punctually in use as a card-case.

Oldmeadow owed her, if indirectly, to the Chadwicks, as he owed so much, even if it was entirely on his own merits that he had won her regard. They had met, years ago, in France; an entirely chance encounter, and probably a futureless one, had it not been for the presence in the hotel at Amboise of the Lumleys. They both slightly knew the Lumleys, and the Lumleys and the Chadwicks were old friends. So it had come about; and if he associated Mrs. Aldesey with tea, he associated her also with perfect omelettes and the Loire. He had liked her at once so much, that, had it not been for an always unseen yet never-repudiated husband in New York, he would certainly, at the beginning, have fallen in love with her. But the unrepudiated husband made as much a part of Mrs. Aldesey's environment as her stays and her prayer-book. The barrier was so evident that one did not even reflect on what one might have done had it not been there; and indeed, Mrs. Aldesey, he now seemed, after many pleasant years of friendship, to recognize, for all the sense of sweetness and exhilaration she gave him, had not enough substance to rouse or sustain his heart. She was, like the tea again, all savour.

She lifted to-day her attentive blue eyes—with age they would become shrewd—and gave him her fine little hand, blue-veined and ornamented with pearls and diamonds in old settings. She wore long earrings and a high, transparent collar of net and lace. Her earrings and her elaborately dressed hair, fair and faded, seemed as much a part of her personality as her eyes, her delicate nose and her small, slightly puckered mouth that dragged provocatively and prettily at one corner when she smiled. Oldmeadow sometimes wondered if she were happy; but never because of anything she said or did.

"I want to hear about some people called Toner," he said, dropping into the easy-chair on the opposite side of the tea-table. It was almost always thus that he and Mrs. Aldesey met. He rarely dined out. "I'm rather perturbed. I think that Barney—you remember young Chadwick—is going to marry a Miss Toner—a Miss Adrienne Toner. And I hope you'll have something to her advantage to tell me. As you know, I'm devoted to Barney and his family."

"I know. The Lumleys' Chadwicks. I remember perfectly. The dear boy with the innocent eyes and sulky mouth. Why don't you bring him to see me? He's dancing the tango in all his spare moments, I suppose, and doesn't care about old ladies." Mrs. Aldesey was not much over forty, but always thus alluded to herself. "Toner," she took up, pouring out his tea. "Why perturbed? Do you know anything against them? Americans, you mean. We poor expatriates are always seen as keepers to so many curious brethren.—Toner. *Celà ne me dit rien*."

"I know nothing against them except that Mrs. Toner, the girl's mother, died, by arrangement, out at sea, on her yacht—in sunlight. Does that say anything? People don't do that in America, do they, as a rule? A very opulent lady, I inferred."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Aldesey now ejaculated, as if enlightened. "Can it be? Do you mean, I wonder, the preposterous Mrs. Toner, of whom, fifteen years ago, I had a glimpse, and used to hear vague rumours? She wandered about the world. She dressed in the Empire period: Queen Louise of Prussia, white gauze bound beneath her chin. She had a harp, and warbled to monarchs. She had an astral body, and a Yogi and a yacht and everything handsome about her. The typical spiritual *cabotine* of our epoch—though I'm sure they must always have existed. Of course it must be she. No one else could have died like that. Has she died, poor woman? On a yacht. Out at sea. In sunlight. How uncomfortable!"

"Yes, she's dead," said Oldmeadow resignedly. "Yes; it's she, evidently. And her daughter is coming down to Coldbrooks this week-end. I'm afraid that unless Barney has too many rivals, he'll certainly marry her. But what you say leads me to infer that he will have rivals and to hope they may be successful. She will, no doubt, marry a prince."

"Something Italian, perhaps. Quite a small fortune will do that. Certainly your nice Barney wouldn't have been at all Mrs. Toner's *affaire*. The girl on her own may think differently, for your Barney is, I remember, very engaging, and has a way with him. I don't know anything about the girl. I didn't know there was one. There's no reason why she may not be charming. Our wonderful people have the gift of picking up experience in a generation and make excellent princesses."

"But she's that sort, you think. The sort that marries princes and has no traditions. Where did they come from? Do you know that?"

"I haven't an idea. Yet, stay. Was it not tooth-paste?—Toner's Peerless Tooth-Paste. Obsolete; yet I seem to see, reminiscently, in far-away nursery days, the picture of a respectable old gentleman with side-whiskers, on a tube. A pretty pink glazed tube with a gilt top to it. Perhaps it's that. Since it was Toner's it would be the father's side; not the warbling mother's. Well, many of us might wish for as unambiguous an origin nowadays. And, in America, we did all sorts of useful things when we first, all of us, came over in the Mayflower!" said Mrs. Aldesey with her dragging smile.

Oldmeadow gazed upon his friend with an ironically receptive eye. "Have they ever known anyone decent? Anyone like yourself? I don't mean over here. I mean in America."

"No one like me, I imagine; if I'm decent. Mrs. Toner essayed a season in New York one winter, and it was then I had my glimpse of her, at the opera, in the Queen Louise dress. A pretty woman, dark, with a sort of soulful and eminently respectable coquetry about her; surrounded by swarms of devotees—all male, to me unknown; and with something in a turban that I took to be a Yogi in the background. She only tried the one winter. She knew what she wanted and where she couldn't get it. We are very dry in New York—such of us as survive. Very little moved by warblings or astral bodies or millions. As you intimate, she'll have done much better over here. You *are* a strange mixture of materialism and ingenuousness, you know."

"It's only that we have fewer Mrs. Toners to amuse us and more to do with millions than you have," said Oldmeadow; but Mrs. Aldesey, shaking her head with a certain sadness, said that it wasn't as simple as all that.

"Have you seen her? Have you seen Adrienne?" she took up presently, making him his second cup of tea. "Is she pretty? Is he very much in love?"

“I’m going down to Coldbrooks on Saturday to see her,” said Oldmeadow, “and I gather that it’s not to subject her to any test that Barney wants me; it’s to subject me, rather. He’s quite sure of her. He thinks she’s irresistible. He merely wants to make assurance doubly sure by seeing me bowled over. I don’t know whether she’s pretty. She has powers, apparently, that make her independent of physical attractions. She lays her hands on people’s heads and cures them. She cured Charlie Lumley of insomnia at Saint Moritz three years ago.”

Mrs. Aldesey, at this, looked at him for some moments in silence. “Yes,” she assented, and in her pause she seemed to have recognized and placed a familiar object. “Yes. She would. That’s just what Mrs. Toner’s daughter would do. I hope she doesn’t warble, too. Laying on hands is better than warbling.”

“I see you think it hopeless,” said Oldmeadow, pushing back his chair and yielding, as he thrust his hands into his pockets and stretched out his legs, to an avowed chagrin. “What a pity it is! A thousand pities. They are such dear, good, simple people, and Barney, though he doesn’t know it, is as simple as any of them. What will become of them with this overwhelming cuckoo in their nest.”

At this Mrs. Aldesey became serious. “I don’t think it hopeless at all. You misunderstand me. Isn’t the fact that he’s in love with her reassuring in itself? He may be simple, but he’s a delicate, discerning creature, and he couldn’t fall in love with some one merely pretentious and absurd. She may be charming. I can perfectly imagine her as charming, and there’s no harm in laying on hands; there may be good. Don’t be narrow, Roger. Don’t go down there feeling dry.”

“I am narrow, and I do feel dry; horribly dry,” said Oldmeadow. “How could the child of such a mother, and of tooth-paste, be charming? Don’t try specious consolation, now, after having more than justified all my suspicions.”

“I’m malicious, not specious; and I can’t resist having my fling. But you mustn’t be narrow and take me *au pied de la lettre*. I assert that she may be charming. I assert that I can see it all working out most happily. She’ll lay her hands on them and they’ll love her. What I really want to say is this: don’t try to set Barney against her. He’ll marry her all the same and never forgive you.”

“Ah; there we have the truth of it. But Barney would always forgive me,” said Oldmeadow.

“Well then, she won’t. And you’d lose him just as surely. And she’ll know. Let me warn you of that. She’ll know perfectly.”

“I’ll keep my hands off her,” said Oldmeadow, “if she doesn’t try to lay hers on me.”

CHAPTER III

The Chadwicks all had a certain sulkiness in their charming looks, and where in Barney it mingled with sweetness, in Palgrave, his younger brother, it mingled with brilliancy. It was Palgrave who, at the station, met the family friend and counsellor in the shabby, inexpensive family car. He was still a mere boy, home from Marlborough for the Easter holidays; fond of Oldmeadow, as all the Chadwicks were; but more resentful of his predominance than Barney and more indifferent to his brotherly solicitude. He had Barney’s long, narrow face and Barney’s eyes and lips; but the former were proud and the latter petulant. To-day, as he sat beside him in the car, Oldmeadow was aware of something at once fixed and vibrating in his bearing. He wanted to say something, and he had resolved to be silent. During their last encounter at Coldbrooks, he and Oldmeadow had had a long, antagonistic political discussion, and Palgrave’s resentment still, no doubt, survived.

Coldbrooks lay among the lower Cotswolds, three miles from the station, and near the station was the village of Chelford where Nancy Averil and her mother lived. Nancy was at Coldbrooks; Aunt Monica—she was called aunt by the Chadwick children, though she and Mrs. Chadwick were first cousins—was away. So Palgrave informed him. But he did not speak again until the chill, green curve of arable hill-side was climbed and a stretch of wind-swept country lay before them. Then suddenly he volunteered: “The American girl is at Coldbrooks.”

“Oh! Is she? When did she come?” Somehow Oldmeadow had expected the later train for Miss Toner.

“Yesterday. She and Barney came down together in her car.”

“So you’ve welcomed her already,” said Oldmeadow, curious of the expression on the boy’s face. “How does she fit into Coldbrooks? Does she like you all and do you like her?”

For a moment Palgrave was silent. “You mean it makes a difference whether we do or not?” he then inquired.

“I don’t know that I meant that. Though if people come into your life it does make a difference.”

“And is she going to come into our lives?” Palgrave asked, and Oldmeadow felt pressure of some sort behind the question. “That’s what I mean. Has Barney told you? He’s said nothing to us. Not even to Mother.”

“Has Barney told me he’s going to marry her? No; he hasn’t. But it’s evident he hopes to. Perhaps it depends on whether she likes Coldbrooks and Coldbrooks likes her.”

“Oh, no, it doesn’t. It doesn’t depend on anything at all except whether she likes Barney,” said Palgrave. “She’s the sort of person who doesn’t depend on anything or anybody except herself. She cuts through circumstance like a knife through cheese. And if she’s not going to take him I wish she’d never come,” he added, frowning and turning, under the peak of his cap, his jewel-like eyes upon his companion. “It’s a case of all or nothing with a person like that. It’s too disturbing—just for a glimpse.”

Oldmeadow felt himself disconcerted. Oddly enough, for the boy was capricious and extravagant, Palgrave’s opinion had more weight with him than Barney’s. Barney, for one thing, was sexually susceptible and Palgrave was not. Though so young, Oldmeadow felt him already of a poetic temperament, passionate in mind and cold in blood.

“She’s so charming? You can’t bear to lose her now you’ve seen her?” he asked.

“I don’t know about charming. No; I don’t think her charming. At least not if you mean something little by the word. She’s disturbing. She changes everything.”

“But if she stays she’ll be more disturbing. She’ll change more.”

“Oh, I shan’t mind that! I shan’t mind change,” Palgrave declared. “If it’s her change and she’s there to see it through.” And, relapsing to muteness, he bent to his brakes and they slid down among the woods of Coldbrooks.

For the life of him and with the best will in the world, he couldn't make it out. That was Oldmeadow's first impression as, among the familiar group gathered in the hall about the tea-table, Miss Toner was at last made manifest to him. She was, he felt sure, in his first shrewd glance at her, merely what Lydia Aldesey would have placed as a third-rate American girl, and her origins in commercial enterprise were eminently appropriate.

She got up to meet him, as if recognizing in him some special significance or, indeed, as it might be her ingenuous habit to do in meeting any older person. But he was not so much older if it came to that; for, after he had met the direct and dwelling gaze of her large, light eyes, the second impression was that she was by no means so young as Barney had led him to expect. She was certainly as old as Barney.

There were none of the obvious marks of wealth upon her. She wore a dark-blue dress tying on the breast over white. She was small in stature and, in manner, composed beyond anything he had ever encountered. With an irony, kindly enough, yet big, he knew, with unfavourable inferences, he even recognized, reconstructing the moment in the light of those that followed, that in rising to meet him as he was named to her, it had been, rather than in shyness or girlishness, in the wish to welcome him and draw him the more happily into a group she had already made her own.

They were all sitting round the plentiful table, set with home-made loaves and cakes, jams and butter, and a Leeds bowl of primroses; Miss Toner just across from him, Barney on one side of her—his was an air of tranquil ecstasy—and little Barbara on the other, and they all seemed to emanate a new radiance; almost, thought Oldmeadow, with an irritability that was still genial, like innocent savages on a remote seashore gathered with intent eyes and parted lips round the newly disembarked Christopher Columbus. Mrs. Chadwick, confused, as usual, among her tea-cups, sending hasty relays of sugar after the unsugared or recalling those sugared in error, specially suggested the simile. She could, indeed, hardly think of her tea. Her wide, startled gaze turned incessantly on the new-comer and to Oldmeadow, for all his nearly filial affection, the eyes of Eleanor Chadwick looked like nothing in the world so much as those of the March Hare in Tenniel's evocation of the endearing creature. Unlike her children, she was fair, with a thin, high, ridiculously distinguished nose; but her mouth and chin had Barney's irresolution and sweetness, and her untidy locks Meg's beauty. Meg was a beauty in every way, rose, pearl and russet, a Romney touched with pride and daring, and the most sophisticated of all the Chadwicks; yet she, too, brooded, half merrily, half sombrely, on Miss Toner, her elbows on the table for the better contemplation. Palgrave's absorption was manifest; but he did not brood. He held his head high, frowned and, for the most part, looked out of the window.

Oldmeadow sat between Palgrave and Nancy and it was with Nancy that the magic ended. Nancy did not share in the radiance. She smiled and was very busy cutting the bread and butter; but she was pale; not puzzled, but preoccupied. Poor darling Nancy; always his special pet; to him always the dearest and most loveable of girls. Not at all a Romney. With her pale, fresh face, dark hair and beautiful hands she suggested, rather, a country lady of the seventeenth century painted by Vandyck. A rural Vandyck who might have kept a devout and merry journal, surprising later generations by its mixture of ingenuousness and wisdom. Her lips were meditative, and her grey eyes nearly closed when she smiled in a way that gave to her gaiety and extraordinary sweetness and intimacy. Nancy always looked as if she loved you when she smiled at you; and indeed she did love you. She had spent her life among people she loved and if she could not be intimate she was remote and silent.

But there was no hope for Nancy. He saw that finally, as he drank his tea in silence and looked across the primroses at the marvel of the age.

Miss Toner's was an insignificant little head, if indeed it could be called little, since it was too large for her body, and her way of dressing her hair in wide braids, pinned round it and projecting over the ears, added to the top-heavy effect. The hair was her only indubitable beauty, fine and fair and sparkling like the palest, purest metal. It was cut in a light fringe across a projecting forehead and her mouth and chin projected, too; so that, as he termed it to himself, it was a squashed-in face, ugly in structure, the small nose, from its depressed bridge, jutting forward in profile, the lips, in profile, flat yet prominent. Nevertheless he owned, studying her over his tea-cup, that the features, ugly, even trivial in detail, had in their assemblage something of unexpected force. Her tranquil smile had potency and he suddenly became aware of her flat, gentle voice, infrequent, yet oddly dominating. Sensitive as he was to voices, he saw it as a bland, blue ribbon rolled out among broken counters of colour, and listened to its sound before he listened to what it said. All the other voices went up and down; all the others half said things and let them drop or trail. She said things to the end: when the ribbon began it was unrolled; and it seemed, always, to make a silence in which it could be watched.

"We went up high into the sunlight," she said, "and one saw nothing but snow and sky. The bells were ringing on the mountains beneath; one heard no other sound. I have never forgotten the moment. It seemed an inspiration of joy and peace and strength."

"You've walked so much in the Alps, haven't you, Roger?" said Mrs. Chadwick. "Miss Toner has motored over every pass."

"In the French Alps. I don't like Switzerland," said Oldmeadow.

"I think I love the mountains everywhere," said Miss Toner, "when they go so high into the sky and have the sun and snow on their summits. But I love the mountains of Savoy and Jura best."

It vexed him that she should. She was a person to stay in and prefer Switzerland. "Joy and peace and strength," echoed in his ears and with the words, rudely, and irrelevantly, the image of the pink glazed tube with the gilt stopper. Miss Toner's teeth were as white as they were benignant.

"I wish I could see those flowers," said Mrs. Chadwick. "I've only been to Vevey in the summer; oh, years and years ago. So dull. Fields of flowers. You've seen them, too, of course, Roger. All the things we grow with such pains. My Saint Brigid anemones never really do—though what I put in of leaf-mould!"

"You'll see anemones, fields of them, in the Alpine meadows; and violets and lilies; the little lilies of Saint Bruno that look like freesias. I love them best of all," the bland, blue ribbon unrolled. "You shall go with me some day, Mrs. Chadwick. We'll go together." And, smiling at her as if they had, already, a happy secret between them, Miss Toner continued: "We'll go this very summer, if you will. We'll motor all the way. I'll come and get you here. For a whole month you shall forget that you've ever had a family to bring up or a house to take care of or anemones that won't grow properly—even in leaf-mould."

Her eyes, as they rested on her hostess, seemed to impart more than her words. They imparted something to

Oldmeadow. He had not before conjectured that Eleanor Chadwick might be bored or tired, nor realized that since Barbara's birth, fourteen years ago, she had not left Coldbrooks except to go to London for a week's shopping, or to stay with friends in the English country. He had taken Eleanor Chadwick's life for granted. It seemed Miss Toner's function not to take things that could be changed for granted. It was easy to do that of course, when you had a large banking account behind you; and yet he felt that Miss Toner would have had the faculty of altering accepted standards, even had she been materially unequipped. She and Mrs. Chadwick continued to look at each other for a moment and the older woman, half bashfully, seemed, with what softness, compelled to a tacit confession. She'd never known before that she was tired. Springs of adventure and girlishness within her were perhaps unsealed by Miss Toner's gaze.

"And where do the rest of us come in!" Barney ejaculated. He was so happy in the triumph of his beloved that his eyes, their sleepiness banished, were almost as brilliant as Palgrave's.

"But you're always coming in with Mrs. Chadwick," said Miss Toner. She looked at him, if with a touch of tender humour, exactly as she looked at his mother; but then she looked at them both as if they were precious to her. "I don't want you to come in at all for that month. I want her to forget you ever existed. There ought to be waters of Lethe for everyone every now and then, even in this life. We come out, after the plunge into forgetfulness, far brighter and stronger and with a renovated self to love the better with. Afterwards—after she's had her dip—you'll all come in, if you want to, with me. I'll get a car big enough. You, too, Miss Averil; and Mr. Oldmeadow; though he and Barney and Palgrave may have to take turns sitting on the portmanteaus."

"Barney" and "Palgrave" already. Her unpretentious mastery alarmed almost as much as it amused him. He thanked her, with his dry smile, saying that he really preferred to see the Alps on his legs and asked, to temper the possible acerbity, "Do you drive yourself?" for it seemed in keeping with his picture of her as an invading providence that she should with her own hand conduct the car of fate. He could see her, somehow, taking the hairpin curves on the Galibier.

But Miss Toner said she did not drive. "One can't see flowers if one drives oneself; and it would hurt dear Macfarlane's feelings so. Macfarlane is my chauffeur and he's been with me for years; from the time we first began to have motors, my mother and I, out in California. Apart from that, I should like it, I think, with the sense of risk and venture it must give. I like the sense of high adventure—of 'Childe Roland to the dark tower came'; don't you, Palgrave? It's life, isn't it? The pulse of life. Danger and venture and conquest. And then resting, on the heights, while one hears the bells beneath one."

This, thought Oldmeadow, as he adjusted his glass the better to examine Miss Toner, must prove itself too much, even for Palgrave to swallow. But Palgrave swallowed it without a tremor. His eyes on hers he answered: "Yes, I feel life like that, too."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Chadwick, and Oldmeadow blessed her antidote to the suffocating sweetness: "I'm afraid I don't! I don't think I know anything about risks and dangers; or about conquest either. I'm sure I've never conquered anything; though I have been dreadfully afraid of ill-tempered servants—if that counts, and never let them see it. Barbara had such an odious nurse. She tried, simply, to keep me out of the nursery; but she didn't succeed. And there was a Scotch cook once, with red hair—that so often goes with a bad temper, doesn't it? Do you remember, Barney?—your dear father had to go down to the kitchen when she was found lying quite, quite drunk under the table. But cooks and nurses can't be called risks—and I've never cared for hunting."

Miss Toner was quietly laughing, and indeed everybody laughed.

"Dear Mrs. Chadwick," she said. And then she added: "How can a mother say she has not known risks and dangers? I think you've thought only of other people for all your life and never seen yourself at all. Alpine passes aren't needed to prove people's courage and endurance."

Oldmeadow now saw, from the sudden alarm and perplexity of Mrs. Chadwick's expression, that she was wondering if the marvellous guest alluded to the perils of child-birth. Perhaps she did. She was ready, he imagined, to allude to anything.

"You're right about her never having seen herself," said Palgrave, nodding across at Miss Toner. "She never has. She's incapable of self-analysis."

"But she's precious sharp when it comes to analysing other people, aren't you, Mummy dear!" said Barney.

"I don't think she is," said Meg. "I think Mummy sees people rather as she sees flowers; things to be fed and staked and protected."

"You're always crabbing Mummy, Meg. It's a shame!—Isn't it a shame, Mummy dear!" Barbara protested, and Barney tempered the apparent criticism—peacemaker as he usually was—with: "But you have to understand flowers jolly well to make them grow. And we do her credit, don't we!"

Miss Toner looked from one to the other as they spoke, with her clear, benignant, comprehending gaze, and Mrs. Chadwick stared with her March Hare ingenuousness that had its full share, too, of March Hare shrewdness. She undertook no self-justification, commenting merely, in the pause that followed Barney's contribution: "I don't know what you mean by self-analysis unless it's thinking about yourself and mothers certainly haven't much time for that. You're quite right there, my dear," she nodded at Miss Toner, adding in a tone intended specially for her: "But young people often exaggerate things that are quite, quite simple when they come."

CHAPTER IV

"Come out and have a stroll," said Oldmeadow to Nancy. Tea was over and a primrose-coloured sunset filled the sky. They walked up and down the gravelled terrace before the house.

Coldbrooks stood high, yet encircled by still higher stretches of bare or wooded upland. Its walled garden, where vegetable beds and lines of cordon apple-trees were pleasingly diversified by the herbaceous borders that ran beneath the walls, lay behind it; most of the bedroom windows looked down into the garden. Before it, to the south, lawns and meadows dropped to a lake fed by the brooks that gave the place its name. Beyond the lake were lower

copses, tinkling now with the musical run of water and climbing softly on either side, so that from the terrace one had a vast curved space of sky before one. The sun was setting over the woods.

It was Barney's grandfather, enriched by large shipping enterprises in Liverpool, who had bought the pleasant old house, half farm, half manor, and Barney's father had married the daughter of a local squire. But the family fortunes were much dwindled, and though Barney still nursed the project of returning one day to farm his own land there was little prospect of such a happy restoration. In spite of the Russian ballet and London portents, he was fonder, far, of Coldbrooks than of all of them put together. But he could afford neither time nor money for hunting, and his home was his only for week-ends and holidays. It was the most loveable of homes, more stately without than within, built of grey-gold Cotswold stone with beautiful stone chimneys and mullioned windows and three gables facing the southern sky. Within, everything was rather bare and shabby. There was no central heating, and no bathrooms. The tiger-skin that lay on the stone flags of the hall had lost all its hair. The piano rattled and wheezed in many of its notes. The patterns of the drawing-room chintzes were faded to a mere dim rosy riot, and stuffing protruded from the angles of the leather arm-chairs in the smoking-room. But it was, all the same, a delightful house to stay in. Eleanor Chadwick's shrewdness showed itself in her housekeeping. She knew what were the essentials. There was always a blazing fire in one's bedroom in the evening and the hottest of water with one's bath in the morning. Under the faded chintz, every chair in the drawing-room was comfortable. The toast was always crisp; the tea always made with boiling water; the servants cheerful. Mrs. Chadwick had a great gift with servants. She could reprove with extreme plaintiveness, yet never wound a susceptibility, and the servants' hall, as she often remarked with justice, was smarter and prettier than the drawing-room. Johnson, the old butler, had been at Coldbrooks since before her marriage, and the grey-haired parlourmaid had come with her when she had come as a bride. These familiar faces added depth to the sense of intimacy that was the gift of Coldbrooks. Oldmeadow loved the place as much as any of the Chadwicks did, and was as much at home in it.

"There is a blackcap," said Nancy, "down in the copse. I felt sure I heard one this morning."

"So it is," said Oldmeadow. They paused to listen.

"It's the happiest of all," said Nancy.

He had been wondering about Nancy ever since he had come. It was not her voice, gentle and meditative, that told him now she was unhappy. It was rather in contrast to the bird's clear ecstasy that he felt the heaviness of her heart.

"It's wilder than the thrush and blackbird, isn't it?" he said. "Less conscious. The thrush is always listening to himself, I feel. Do you want to go to the Alps with Miss Toner, Nancy?"

Nancy would not see Miss Toner as an angelic being and he wanted to know how she did see her. The others, it was evident, thought her angelic by a sort of group suggestion. She thought herself so, to begin with; snow, flowers, bells and all the rest of it; and they, ingenuous creatures, saw the mango-tree rising to heaven as the calm-eyed Yogi willed they should. But Nancy did not see the mango-tree. She was outside the group consciousness—with him.

"Oh, no!" she now said quickly; and she added: "I don't mean that I don't like her. It's only that I don't know her. How can she want us? She came only yesterday."

"But, you see, she means you to know her. And when she's known she couldn't imagine that anyone wouldn't like her."

"I don't think she's conceited, if you mean that, Roger."

"Conceit," he rejoined, "may be of an order so monstrous that it loses all pettiness. You've seen more of her than I have, of course."

"I think she's good. She wants to do good. She wants to make people happy; and she does," said Nancy.

"By taking them about in motors, you mean."

"In every way. She's always thinking about pleasing them. In big and little ways. Aunt Eleanor loves her already. They had a long talk last night in Aunt Eleanor's room. She's given Meg the most beautiful little pendant—pearl and amethyst, an old Italian setting. She had it on last night and Meg said how lovely it was and she simply lifted it off her own neck and put it around Meg's. Meg had to keep it. She gave it in such a way that one would have to keep it."

"Rather useful, mustn't it be, to have pendants so plentifully about you that you can hand them out to the first young lady who takes a fancy to them? Has she given you anything, Nancy?"

"I'm sure she would. But I shall be more careful than Meg was."

"Perhaps Meg will practise carelessness, since it's so remunerative. What has she given Palgrave? He seems absorbed."

"Isn't it wonderful," said Nancy. "It's wonderful for Palgrave, you know, Roger, because he is rather sad and bitter, really, just now; and I think she will make him much happier. They went off to the woods together directly after breakfast."

"What's he sad and bitter about? You mean his socialism and all the rest of it?"

"Yes; and religion. You remember; when you were here at Christmas."

"I remember that he was very foolish and made me lose my temper. Is there a chance of Miss Toner turning him into a good capitalist and churchman?"

Nancy smiled, but very faintly. "It's serious, you know, Roger."

"What she's done to them already, you mean?"

"Yes. What she's done already. She had Meg, after lunch, in her room. Meg looked quite different when she came out. It's very strange, Roger. It's as if she'd changed them all. I almost feel," Nancy looked round at the happy house and up at the tranquil elms where the rooks were noisily preparing for bed, "as if nothing could be the same again, since she's come." Her clear profile revealed little of the trouble in her heart. They had not named Barney; but he must be named.

"It's white magic," said Oldmeadow. "You and I will keep our heads, my dear. We don't want to be changed, do we? What has she done to Barney? He is in love with her, of course."

"Of course," said Nancy.

He had never been sure before that she was in love with Barney. She was nine years younger and had been a

child during years of his manhood. Oldmeadow had thought it in his own fond imagination only that the link between them was so close. But now he knew what Nancy herself, perhaps, had hardly known till then. The colour did not rise in her cheek, but through her voice, through her bearing, went a subtle steadying of herself. “Of course he is in love with her,” she repeated and he felt that she forced herself to face the truth.

They stopped at the end of the terrace. A little path turned aside towards the copse and the grass beneath the trees was scattered with the pale radiance of primroses. Nancy seemed to look at the flowers, but she sought no refuge in comment on them; and as they looked in silence, while the rooks, circling and cawing above, settled on their nests, a sense of arrested time came to Oldmeadow, and a phrase of music, blissful in its sadness, where gentle German words went to a gentle German strain, passed through his mind. Something of Schubert’s—Young Love—First Grief. It seemed to pierce to him from the young girl’s heart and he knew that he would never forget and that Nancy would never forget the moment; the rooks; the primroses; the limpid sky. The blackcap’s flitting melody had ceased.

“Do you think she may make him happy?” he asked. It was sweet to him to know that she had no need of a refuge from him. She could take counsel with him as candidly as if there had been no tacit avowal between them. She looked round at him as they went on walking and he saw pain and perplexity in her eyes.

“What do you think, Roger?” she said. “Can she?”

“Well, might she, if Barney is stupid enough?”

“I don’t feel he would have to be stupid to be happy with her, Roger. You are not fair to her. What I wonder is whether he will be strong enough not to be quite swept away.”

“You think she’ll overpower him? Leave him with no mind of his own?”

“Something like that perhaps. Because she’s very strong. And she is so different. Everything in her is different. She has nothing—nothing with us, or we with her. We haven’t done the same things or seen the same sights or thought the same thoughts. I hardly feel as if the trees could look the same to her as they do to us or the birds sound the same. And she’ll want such different things.”

“Perhaps she’ll want his things,” Oldmeadow mused. “She seems to like them quite immensely already.”

“Ah, but only because she’s going to do something to them,” said Nancy. “Only because she’s going to change them. I don’t think she’d like anything she could do nothing for.”

Nancy had quite grown up. She had seen further than he had. He felt her quiet comment big with intuitive wisdom.

“You see deep, my dear,” he said. “There’s something portentous in your picture, you know.”

“There is something portentous about her, Roger. That is just what I feel. That is just what troubles me.”

“She may be portentous, in relation to us, and what she may do to us,” said Oldmeadow, “but I’m convinced, for all her marvels, that she’s a very ordinary young person. Don’t let us magnify her. If she’s not magnified she won’t work so many marvels. They’re largely an affair, I’m sure of it, of motors and pendants. She’s ordinary. That’s what I take my stand on.”

“If she’s ordinary, why do you feel, too, that she’ll sweep Barney away?” Nancy was not at all convinced by his demonstration.

“Why, because he’s in love with her. That’s all. Her only menace is in her difference; her complacency. What it comes to, I suppose, is that we must hope, if they’re to be happy, that he’ll like her things.”

“Yes; but what it comes to then, Roger, is that we shall lose Barney,” Nancy said.

CHAPTER V

Miss Toner did not come down to breakfast next morning and Oldmeadow was conscious of a feeling of disproportionate relief at not finding her in the big, bare, panelled dining-room where a portrait of Mrs. Chadwick in court dress presided over one wall and Meg and Barney played with rabbits, against an imitation Gainsborough background, on another. Both pictures were an affliction to Barney; but to Mrs. Chadwick’s eye they left nothing to be desired in beauty, and, when Barney was not there to protest, she would still fondly point out the length of eyelash that the artist had so faithfully captured in the two children.

The sense of change and foreboding that he and Nancy, with differences, had recognized in their talk, must have haunted Oldmeadow’s slumbers, for he had dreamed of Miss Toner, coming towards him along the terrace, in white, as she had been at dinner, with the beautiful pearls she had worn, lifting her hand and saying as the rooks cawed overhead—for the rooks cawed though the moon was brightly shining: “I can hear them, too.”

There had been nothing to suggest such a dream in her demeanour at dinner; nothing portentous, that is. Simple for all her competence, girlish for all the splendour of her white array, she had spoken little, looking at them all, and listening, gravely sometimes, but with a pervading gentleness; and once or twice he had found her eyes on his; those large, light eyes, dispassionately and impersonally benignant, giving him, with their suggestion of seeing around but also very far beyond you, a curious sense of space. Once or twice he had felt himself a little at a loss as he met their gaze—it had endeared her to him the less that she should almost discompose him—and he had felt anew the presence of power in her ugly little face and even of beauty in her colourless skin, her colourless yet so living eyes, and her crown of wondrous gold. It had been, no doubt, this element of aesthetic significance, merging with Nancy’s words, that had built up the figure of his dream; for so he had seen her, grey and white and gold in the unearthly light, while the rooks cawed overhead.

His friends this morning, though they were all talking of her, possessed in their gaiety and lightness of heart an exorcising quality. So much gaiety and lightness couldn’t be quenched or quelled—if that was what Miss Toner’s influence menaced. Between them all they would manage to quench and quell Miss Toner, rather, and he recovered his sense of her fundamental absurdity as he felt anew their instinctive and unself-conscious wisdom.

“Isn’t it odd, Roger, she hardly knows England at all,” said Mrs. Chadwick, as he finished his porridge, made his

tea at the side-table, and took his place beside her. “She’s been so little here, although she seems to have travelled everywhere and lived everywhere.”

“Except in her own country,” Oldmeadow ventured the surmise, but urbanely, for Barney sat opposite him.

“Oh, but she’s travelled there, too, immensely,” said Barney. “She’s really spent most of her life in America, I think, Mother. She has a little sort of bungalow on the coast in California, orange-trees and roses and all the rest of it; a fairy-tale place; and a house in the mountains in New England, high up among the pine-woods.”

“And a private train, I suppose, to carry her from one to the other. What splendid pearls,” said Oldmeadow, buttering his toast. “Haven’t you asked for them yet, Meg?”

Meg was not easily embarrassed. “Not yet,” she said. “I’m waiting for them, though. Meanwhile this is pretty, isn’t it?” The pendant hung on her breast.

“I believe she would give Meg her pearls, or any of us. I believe she’d give *anything* to *anyone*,” sighed Mrs. Chadwick. “She doesn’t seem to think about money or things of that sort, material things you know, at all. I do wish I could get the map of America straight. All being in those uneven squares, like Turkish Delight, makes it so difficult. One can’t remember which lump is which—though Texas, in my geography, was pale green. The nice tinned things come from California, don’t they? And New England is near Boston—the hub of the universe, that dear, droll Oliver Wendell Holmes used to call it. I suppose they *are* very clever there. She has been wonderfully educated. There’s nothing she doesn’t seem to have learned. And her maid adores her, Roger. I was talking to her just now. Such a nice French woman with quite beautiful dark eyes, but very melancholy; we make a mistake, I believe, in imagining that the French are a gay people. I always think that’s such a good sign. So kind about my dreadful accent.”

“A good sign to have your maid like you, Mummy, or to have melancholy eyes?” Meg inquired. “I think she’s a rather ill-tempered looking woman. But of course anybody would adore Adrienne. She’s an angel of patience, I’m sure. I never met such an angel. We don’t grow them here,” said Meg, while Barney’s triumphant eyes said: “I told you so,” to Oldmeadow across the table.

After breakfast, in the sunlight on the terrace, Mrs. Chadwick confided her hopes to him. “She really is an angel, Roger. I never met anyone in the least like her. So good, and gifted, too, and all that money. Only think what it would mean for dear Barney. He could take back the farm; the lease falls in next year, and come back here to live.”

“You think she cares for him?”

“Yes; indeed I do. She cares for us all, already, as you can see. But I believe it’s because she’s adopting us all, as her family. And she said to me yesterday that she disapproved so much of our English way of turning out mothers and thought families ought to love each other and live together, young and old. That’s from being so much in France, perhaps. I told her *I* shouldn’t have liked it at all if old Mrs. Chadwick had wanted to come and live with Francis and me. She was such a masterful old lady, Roger, very Low Church, and quite dreadfully jealous of Francis. And eldest sons should inherit, of course, or what would become of estates? My dear father used always to say that the greatness of England was founded on landed estates. I told her that. But she looked at me quite gravely as if she hardly understood when I tried to explain—it all goes in with Waterloo being won on the fields of Eton, doesn’t it? It’s quite curious the feeling of restfulness she gives me, about Barney—a sort of Nunc Dimittis feeling, you know.”

“Only she doesn’t want you to depart. Well, that’s certainly all to the good and let’s hope England’s greatness won’t suffer from the irregularity. Has she told you much about her life? her people?” Oldmeadow asked. He could not find it in his heart to shadow such ingenuous contentment. And after all what was there to say against Miss Toner, except that she would change things?

“Oh, a great deal. Everything I asked; for I thought it best, quite casually you know, to find out what I could. Not people of any position, you know, Roger, though I think her mother was better in that way than her father; for *his* father made tooth-paste. It’s from the tooth-paste all the money comes. But it’s always puzzling about Americans, isn’t it? And it doesn’t really make any difference, once they’re over here, does it?”

“Not if they’ve got the money,” he could not suppress; it was for his own personal enjoyment and Mrs. Chadwick cloudlessly concurred: “No, not if they have the money. And she has, you see. And besides that she’s good and gifted and has had such a wonderful education. Her mother died five years ago. She showed me two pictures of her. A beautiful woman; very artistic-looking. Rather one’s idea of Corinne, though Corinne was really Madame de Staël, I believe; and she was very plain.”

“Was she dressed like Queen Louise of Prussia; coming down the steps, you know, in the Empire dress with white bound round her head?”

“Yes; she was. How did you know, Roger? Extremely picturesque; but quite a lady, too. At least”—Mrs. Chadwick hesitated, perplexed between kindliness and candour—“almost.”

“I heard about her from Mrs. Aldesey. You remember my American friend. She didn’t know her, but had seen her years ago in New York in that romantic costume.”

Mrs. Chadwick felt perhaps the slight irony in his voice, for she rejoined, though not at all provocatively: “Why shouldn’t people look romantic if they can? I should think Mrs. Toner had a much more romantic life than Mrs. Aldesey. *She’s* gone on just as we have, hasn’t she, seeing always the same people; and being conventional. Whereas Adrienne and her mother seem to have known everyone strange and interesting wherever they went; great scientists and thinkers, you know; and poets and pianists. Adrienne told me that her mother always seemed to her to have great wings and that’s just what I felt about her when I looked at her. She’d flown everywhere.” As she spoke Miss Toner appeared upon the doorstep.

Although it was Sunday she had not varied her dress, which was still the simple dress of dim, dark-blue; but over it she wore a silk jacket, and a straw hat trimmed with a lighter shade of blue was tied, in summer-like fashion, beneath her chin. She carried a sunshade and a small basket filled with letters.

Mrs. Chadwick, both hands outstretched, went to meet her. Oldmeadow had never before seen her kiss an acquaintance of two days’ standing. “I do hope you slept well, my dear,” she said.

“Very well,” said Miss Toner, including Oldmeadow in her smile. “Except for a little while when I woke up and lay awake and couldn’t get the cawing of your rooks out of my mind. I seemed to hear them going on and on.”

“Oh, dear! How unfortunate! But surely they weren’t cawing in the night!” cried Mrs. Chadwick, and Miss Toner, laughing and holding her still by the hands, turned to tell Barney, who closely followed her, that his mother

was really afraid, because she had thought of rooks in the night, that their Coldbrooks birds had actually been inhospitable enough to keep her awake with their cawings. Meg and Barbara and Nancy had all now emerged and there was much laughter and explanation.

"You see, Mummy thinks you might work miracles—even among the rooks," said Barney, while Oldmeadow testily meditated on his own discomfort. It might have been mere coincidence, or it might—he must admit it—have been Miss Toner's thoughts travelling into his dream or his dream troubling her thoughts; of the two last alternatives he didn't know which he disliked the more.

"It's time to get ready for church, children," said Mrs. Chadwick, when, after much merriment at her expense, the rooks and their occult misdemeanours were disposed of. "Where is Palgrave? I do hope he won't miss again. It does so hurt dear Mr. Bodman's feelings. Are you coming with us, my dear?" she asked Miss Toner.

Miss Toner, smiling upon them all, her sunshade open on her shoulder, said that if they did not mind she did not think she would come. "I only go to church when friends get married or their babies christened," she said, "or something of that sort. I was never brought up to it, you see. Mother never went."

Mrs. Chadwick's March Hare eyes dwelt on her. "You aren't a Churchwoman?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Miss Toner, and the very suggestion seemed to amuse her.

Mrs. Chadwick hesitated: "A Dissenter?" she ventured. "There are so many sects in America I've heard. Though I met a very charming American bishop once."

"No—not a Dissenter; if you mean by that a Presbyterian or a Methodist or a Swedenborgian," said Miss Toner, shaking her head.

Palgrave had now joined them and stood on the step above her. She smiled round and up at him.

Mrs. Chadwick, her distress alleviated yet her perplexity deepened, ventured further: "You are a Christian, I hope, dear?"

"Oh, not at all," said Miss Toner gravely now and very kindly. "Not in any orthodox way, I mean. Not in any way that an American bishop or your Mr. Bodman would acknowledge. I recognize Christ as a great teacher, as a great human soul; one of the very greatest; gone on before. But I don't divide the human from the divine in the way the churches do; creeds mean nothing to me, and I'd rather say my prayers out of doors on a day like this, in the sunlight, than in any church. I feel nearer God alone in His great world, than in any church built with human hands. But we must all follow our own light." She spoke in her flat, soft voice, gravely but very simply; and she looked affectionately at her hostess as she added: "You wouldn't want me to come with you from mere conformity."

Poor Mrs. Chadwick, standing, her brood about her, in the sweet Sabbath sunlight, had to Oldmeadow's eye an almost comically arrested air. How was a creedless, churchless mistress of Coldbrooks to be fitted in to her happy vision of Barney's future? What would the village say to a squiress who never went to church and who said her prayers in the sunlight alone? "But, of course, better alone," he seemed to hear her cogitate, "than that anyone should see her doing such a very curious thing." And aloud she did murmur: "Of course not; of course not, dear. And if you go into the little arbour down by the lake no one will disturb you, I'm sure. Must it be quite in the open? Mere conformity is such a shallow thing. But all the same I should like the rector to come and talk things over with you. He's such a good man and very, very broad-minded. He brings science so often into his sermons—sometimes I think the people don't quite follow it all; and only the other day he said to me, about modern unrest and scepticism:

'There is more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.'

Mamma met Lord Tennyson once and felt him to be a deeply religious man—though rather ill-tempered; he was really very rude to her, I always thought, and I do so dislike rudeness.—And travelling about so much, dear, you probably had so little teaching."

Miss Toner's eyes were incapable of irony and they only deepened now in benevolence as they rested on her hostess. "But I haven't any doubts," she said, shaking her head and smiling: "No doubts at all. You reach the truth through your church and I reach it through nature and love and life. And the beautiful thing is that it's the same truth, really; the same beautiful truth that God loves us all, and that we are all the children of God. I should be very pleased to meet your rector, of course, because I like meeting anyone who is good and true. But I was taught. My mother taught me always. And she was the freest, wisest soul I have ever known."

"I'll stay with you," said Palgrave suddenly from his place on the step above her. His eyes, over her shoulder, had met Oldmeadow's and perhaps what he saw in the old friend's face determined his testimony. "Church means nothing to me, either; and less than nothing. I'm not so charitable as you are, and don't think all roads lead to truth. Some lead away, I think. You know perfectly well, Mummy, that the dear old rector is a regular duffer and you slept all through the sermon the last time I went; you did, really! I was too amused to sleep. He was trying to explain original sin without mentioning Adam or Eve or the Garden of Eden. It was most endearing! Like some one trying to avoid the eye of an old acquaintance whom they'd come to the conclusion they really must cut! I do so like the idea of Adam and Eve becoming unsuitable acquaintances for the enlightened clergy!"

"There is no sin," said Miss Toner. Barney was not quite comfortable; Oldmeadow saw that. He kicked about in the gravel, a little flushed, and when, once or twice, the old family friend met his eye, it was quickly averted. "God is Good; and everything else is mortal mind—mistake—illusion."

"You are a sound Platonist, Miss Toner," Oldmeadow observed, and his kindness hardly cloaked his irony.

"Am I?" she said. When she looked at one she never averted her eyes. She looked until she had seen all that she wished to see. "I am not fond of metaphysics."

"Socrates defined sin as ignorance, you know, and in a sense it may be. All the same," said Oldmeadow, and he felt that they were all listening and that in the eyes of his old friends it was more than unlikely that he would get the better of Miss Toner—"there's mortal mind to be accounted for, isn't there, and why it gets us continually into such a mess. Whatever name you call it by, there is something that does get us into a mess and mightn't it be a wholesome discipline to hear it denounced once a week?"

"Not by some one more ignorant than I am!" said Miss Toner, laughing gently. "I'll go to church for love of Mrs. Chadwick, but not for the sake of the discipline!"

“Mr. Bodman never denounces. Roger is giving you quite a wrong idea,” said Mrs. Chadwick. She had stood looking from one to the other, distressed and bewildered, and she now prepared to leave them. “And Palgrave is very, very unjust. Of course you must not come, dear. It would make me quite unhappy. But Mr. Bodman is not a duffer. If Palgrave feels like that he must certainly stay away. Perhaps you can teach him to be more charitable. It’s easy to see the mote in our neighbour’s eye.” Mrs. Chadwick’s voice slightly trembled. She had been much moved by her son’s defection.

“Come, Mummy, you’re not going to say *I’m* a duffer!” Palgrave passed an affectionately bantering arm round her shoulders. “Dufferism isn’t *my* beam!”

But very sadly Mrs. Chadwick drew away, saying as she turned into the house: “No; that isn’t your beam. But pride may be, Palgrave. Spiritual pride.”

Oldmeadow remained standing in the sunlight with Miss Toner and the two young men. The girls had followed Mrs. Chadwick, Meg casting a laughing glance of appreciation at him as she went. Religious scruples would never keep Meg from church if she had a pretty spring dress to wear.

“After all,” he carried on, mildly, the altercation—if that was what it was between him and Miss Toner—“good Platonists as we may be, we haven’t reached the stage of Divine Contemplation yet and things do happen that are difficult to account for, if sin is nothing more positive than illusion and mistake. All the forms of *ôte-toi que je m’y mette*. All the forms of jealousy and malice. Deliberate cruelties. History is full of horrors, isn’t it? There’s a jealousy of goodness in the human heart, as well as a love. The betrayal of Christ by Judas is symbolic.”

He had screwed his eyeglass into his eye the better to see Miss Toner and looked very much like a solicitor trying to coax dry facts out of a romantic client. And in the transparent shadow of her hat Miss Toner, with her incomparable composure, gave him all her attention.

“I don’t account. I don’t account for anything. Do you?” she said. “I only feel and know. But even the dreadful things, the things that seem to us so dreadful—isn’t it always ignorance? Ignorance of what is really good and happy—and the illusion of a separate self? When we are all, really, one. All, really, together.” She held out her arms, her little basket hanging from her wrist. “And if we feel that at last, and know it, those dreadful things can’t happen any more.”

“Your ‘if’ is the standing problem of metaphysics and ethics. Why don’t we feel and know it? That’s the question? And since we most of us, for most of the time, don’t feel and know it, don’t we keep closer to the truth if we accept the traditional phraseology and admit that there’s something in the texture of life, something in ourselves, that tempts us, or impedes us, or crushes us, and call it sin—evil?”

He was looking at her, still with his latent irony though kindly enough indeed, and he had, as he looked, an intuition about her. She had never been tempted, she had never been impeded, she had never been crushed. That was her power. She was, in a fashion, sinless. It was as if she had been hypnotized in infancy to be good. And while the fact made her in one sense so savourless, it made her in another so significant. She would go much further than most people in any direction she wanted to go simply because she was not aware of obstacles and had no inhibitions.

“Call it what you like,” said Miss Toner. She still smiled—but more gravely. Barney had ceased to stroll and kick. He had come to a standstill beside them, and, his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed on his beloved, showed himself as completely reassured. Palgrave still stood on the step above her and seemed to watch the snowy, piled-up clouds that adorned the tranquil sky. “I feel it a mistake to make unreal things seem real by giving them big names. We become afraid of them and fear is what impedes us most of all in life. For so many generations humanity has seen ghosts in the evening mists and taken its indigestion for the promptings of a demon. We’ve got away from all that now, Mr. Oldmeadow. We see that mists are mists and indigestion indigestion, and that there aren’t such things as ghosts and demons. We’ve come out, all together, hand in hand, on the Open Road and we don’t want, ever any more, to be reminded, even, of the Dark Ages.”

Before her fluency, Oldmeadow felt himself grow less kindly. “You grant there have been dark ages, then? I count that a concession. Things may not be evil now, but they were once.”

“Not a concession at all,” said Miss Toner. “Only an explanation of what has happened—an explanation of what you call the mess, Mr. Oldmeadow.”

“So that when we find ourselves misbehaving to one another as we march along the Open Road, we may know it’s only indigestion and take a pill.”

She didn’t like badinage. That, at all events, was evident to him, even in her imperturbability. She took it calmly—not lightly; and if she was not already beginning to dislike him, it was because disliking people was a reality she didn’t recognize. “We don’t misbehave if we are on the Open Road,” she said.

“Oh, but you’re falling back now on good old-fashioned theology,” Oldmeadow retorted. “The sheep, saved and well-behaved, keeping to the road, and the goats—all those who misbehave and stray—classed with the evening mists.”

“No,” said Miss Toner eyeing him, “I don’t class them with the evening mists; I class them with the sick, whom we must be kind to and take care of.”

Mrs. Chadwick was now emerging in her new spring hat, which was not very successful and gave emphasis to her general air of strain. Meg’s hat was very successful, as Meg’s hats always were; and if Nancy’s did not shine beside it, it was, at all events, exceedingly becoming to her. Nancy’s eyes went to Barney. Barney, in the past, had been very appreciative of becoming hats. But he had no eyes for Nancy now. He had drawn Miss Toner aside and Oldmeadow heard their colloquy:

“Would you rather I didn’t go?”

“I’d rather, always, you followed your light, dear friend.”

“I do like going here, you know. It seems to belong with it all—and Mummy can’t bear our not going.”

“It makes your dear mother happy. It all means love to you.”

“Not only that”—Oldmeadow imagined that Barney blushed, and he heard his stammer: “I don’t know what I believe about everything; but the service goes much deeper than anything I could think for myself.” Their voices dropped. All that came further to Oldmeadow was from Miss Toner: “It makes you nearer than if you stayed.”

“Confound her ineffability!” he thought. “It rests with her, then, whether he should go or stay.”

It certainly did. Barney moved away with them all, leaving Palgrave to the more evident form of proximity.

"You know," Mrs. Chadwick murmured to Oldmeadow as they went, between the primroses, down the little path and through a wicket-gate that led to the village—"you know, Roger, it's *quite* possible that they may say their prayers together. It's like Quakers, isn't it—or Moravians; or whoever those curious people are who are buried standing up—so dismal and uncomfortable, I always think. But it's better that Palgrave should say his prayers with some one, and somewhere, isn't it, than that he shouldn't say them at all?"

CHAPTER VI

"MOTHER'S got the most poisonous headache," said Meg. "I don't think she'll be able to come down to tea."

She had joined Oldmeadow on the rickety old bench where he sat reading and smoking in a sunny corner of the garden. A band of golden wallflowers behind them exhaled the deep fragrance that he always associated with spring and Sunday and Coldbrooks, and the old stone wall behind the flowers exhaled a warmth that was like a fragrance.

"Adrienne is with her," Meg added. She had seated herself and put her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands as though she intended a solid talk.

"Will that be likely to help her head?" Oldmeadow inquired. "I should say not, if she's going to continue the discourse of this morning."

"Did you think all that rather silly?" Meg inquired, tapping her smart toes on the ground and watching them. "You looked as if you did. But then you usually do look as though you thought most things and people silly. I didn't—I mean, not in her. I quite saw what you did; at least I think so. But she can say things that would be silly in other people. Now Palgrave is silly. There's just the difference. Is it because he always feels he's scoring off somebody and she doesn't?" Meg was evidently capable, for all her devotion, of dispassionate inquiry.

"She's certainly more secure than Palgrave," said Oldmeadow. "But I feel that's only because she's less intelligent. Palgrave is aware, keenly, of a critical and probably hostile world; and Miss Toner is unaware of everything except her own benevolence, and the need for it."

Meg meditated. Then she laughed. "You *are* spiteful, Roger. Oh—I don't mean about Adrienne in particular. But you always see the weak spots in people, first go. It's rather jolly, all the same, if you come to think it over, to be like that. Perhaps that's all she is aware of; but it takes you a good way—wanting to help people and seeing how they can be helped."

"Yes; it does take you a good way. I don't deny that Miss Toner will go far."

"And make us go too far, perhaps?" Meg mused. "Well, I'm quite ready for a move. I think we're all rather stodgy, really, down here. And up in London, too, if it comes to that. I'm rather disappointed in London, you know, Roger, and what it does for one. Just a different kind of sheep, it seems to me, from the kind we are in the country; noisy skipping sheep instead of silent, slow ones. But they all follow each other about in just the same way. And what one likes is to see someone who isn't following."

"Yes; that's true, certainly," Oldmeadow conceded. "Miss Toner isn't a sheep. She's the sort of person who sets the sheep moving. I'm not so sure that she knows where she is going, all the same."

"You mean—Be careful; don't you?" said Meg, looking up at him sideways with her handsome eyes. "I'm not such a sheep myself, when it comes to that, you know, Roger. I look before I leap—even after Adrienne," she laughed; and Oldmeadow, looking back at her, laughed too—pleased with her, yet a little disconcerted by what she revealed of experience.

"The reason I like her so awfully," Meg went on—while he reflected that, after all, she was now twenty-five—"and it's a good thing I do, isn't it, since it's evident she's going to take Barney; but the reason is that she's so interested in one. More than anyone I ever knew—far and far away. Of course Mother's interested; but it's *for* one; *about* one; not *in* one, as it were. And then darling old Mummy isn't exactly intelligent, is she; or only in such unexpected spots that it's never much good to one; one can never count on it beforehand. Whereas Adrienne is so interested in you that she makes you feel more interested in yourself than you ever dreamed you could feel. Do you know what I mean? Is it because she's American, do you think? English people aren't interested in themselves, off their own bat, perhaps; or in other people either! I don't mean we're not selfish all right!" Meg laughed.

"Selfish and yet impersonal," Oldmeadow mused. "With less of our social consciousness in use, with more of it locked up in automatism, possibly."

"There's nothing locked up in Adrienne; absolutely nothing," Meg declared. "It's all there—out in the shop-window. And it's a big window too, even though some of the hats and scarves, so to speak, may strike us as funny. But, seriously, what is it about her, do you think? How can she care so much?—about everybody?"

He remembered Nancy's diagnosis. "Not about everybody. Only about people she can do something for. You'll find she won't care about me."

"Why should she? You don't care for her. Why should she waste herself on people who don't need her?" Meg's friendliness of glance did not preclude a certain hardness.

"Why indeed? It could never occur to her, of course, that she might need somebody. I don't mean that spitefully. She is strong. She doesn't need."

"Exactly. Like you," said Meg. "She's quite right to pay no attention to the other strong people. For of course you are very strong, Roger, and frightfully clever; and good, too. Only one has to be cleverer, no doubt, than we are to see your goodness as easily as Adrienne's. It's the shop-window again. She shows her goodness all the time; and you don't."'

Oldmeadow knocked the ashes out of his pipe and felt for his tobacco-pouch. "I show my spite. No; you mustn't count me among the good. I suppose your mother's headache came on this morning after she found out that Miss Toner doesn't go to church."

"Of course it was that. You saw that she was thinking about it all through the service, didn't you?" said Meg.

“And once, poor lamb, she said, ‘Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners’ instead of Amen. Did you notice? It will bother her frightfully, of course. But after all it’s not so bad as if Adrienne were a Dissenter and wanted to go to chapel! Mummy in her heart of hearts would much rather you were a pagan than a Dissenter. I don’t think it will make a bit of difference really. So long as she gives money to the church, and is nice to the village people. Mother will get over it,” said Meg.

He thought so too. His own jocose phrase returned to him. As long as the money was there it didn’t make any difference. But Meg’s security on that score interested him. With all her devotion to the new friend she struck him, fundamentally, as less kind than Nancy, who had none. But that, no doubt, was because Meg, fundamentally, was hard and Nancy loving. It was because of Miss Toner’s interest in herself that Meg was devoted. “You’re so sure, then, that she’s going to take Barney?” he asked.

“Quite sure,” said Meg. “Surer than he is. Surer than she is. She’s in love with him all right; more than she knows herself, poor dear. No doubt she thinks she’s making up her mind and choosing. Weighing Barney in the balance and counting up his virtues. But it’s all decided already; and not by his virtues; it never is,” said Meg, again with her air of unexpected experience. “It’s something much more important than virtues; it’s the thickness of his eyelashes and the way his teeth show when he smiles, and all his pretty ways and habits. Things like that. She loves looking at him and more than that, even, she loves having him look at her. I have an idea that she’s not had people very much in love with her before; not people with eyelashes and teeth like Barney. In spite of all her money. And she’s getting on, too. She’s as old as Barney, you know. It’s the one, real romance that’s ever come to her, poor dear. Funny you don’t see it. Men don’t see that sort of thing I suppose. But she *couldn’t* give Barney up now, simply. It’s because of that, you know”—Meg glanced behind them and lowered her voice—“that she doesn’t like Nancy.”

“Doesn’t like Nancy!” Oldmeadow’s instant indignation was in his voice. “What has Nancy to do with it?”

“She might have had a great deal, poor darling little Nancy; and it’s that Adrienne feels. She felt it at once. I saw she did; that Nancy and Barney had been very near each other; that there was an affinity, a sympathy, call it what you like, that would have led to something more. It wouldn’t have done at all, of course; at least I suppose not. They knew each other too well; and, until the last year or two, she’s been too young for him. And then, above all, she’s hardly any money. But all the same, if he hadn’t come across Adrienne and been bowled over like this, Barney would have fallen in love with Nancy. She’s getting to be so lovely looking, for one thing, isn’t she? And Barney’s so susceptible to looks. He was falling in love with her last winter and she knew it as well as I did. It’s rather rotten luck for Nancy because I’m afraid she cares; but then women do have rotten luck about love affairs,” said Meg, now sombrely. “The dice are loaded against them every time.”

Oldmeadow sat smoking in silence for some moments, making no effort to master his strong resentment; taking, rather, full possession of its implications. “Somewhat of a flaw in your angel you must admit,” he said presently. “She doesn’t like people who are as strong as she is and she doesn’t like people who might have been loved instead of herself. It narrows the scale of her benevolence, you know. It makes her look perilously like a jealous prig, and a prig without any excuse for jealousy into the bargain.”

“Temper, Roger,” Meg observed, casting her hard, friendly glance round at him; “I know you think there’s no one quite to match Nancy; and I think you’re not far wrong. She’s the straightest, sweetest-tempered girl who ever stepped on two feet. But all the same Adrienne isn’t a prig, and if she’s jealous she can’t help herself. She *wants* to love Nancy; she thinks she does love her; she’ll always be heavenly to her. She can do a lot for Nancy, you know. She will do a lot for her, even if Nancy holds her off. But she wishes frightfully that she was old and ugly. She wishes that Barney weren’t so fond of her without thinking about her. She’s jealous and she can’t help herself—like all the rest of us!” Meg laughed grimly. “When it comes to that we’re none of us angels.”

It was tea-time and the dear old gong sounded balmily from the house. As they went along the path the rooks again were cawing overhead and dimly, like the hint of evening in the air, he remembered his dream and the sense of menace. “You know, it’s not like all the rest of you,” he said. “It’s not like Nancy, for instance. Nancy wouldn’t dislike a person because she was jealous of them. In fact I don’t believe Nancy could be jealous. She’d only be hurt.”

“It’s rather a question of degree, that, isn’t it?” said Meg. “In one form of it you’re poisoned and in the other you’re cut with a knife; and the latter is the prettier way of suffering; doesn’t make you come out in a rash and feel sick. Nancy is cut with the knife; and if she’s not jealous in the ugly sense, she dislikes Adrienne all right.”

“Why should she like her?” Oldmeadow retorted, and Meg’s simile seemed to cut into him, too. “She doesn’t need her money or her interest or her love. She doesn’t dislike her. She merely wishes she were somewhere else—as I do.”

The garden path led straight into the house. One entered a sort of lobby, where coats and hats and rackets and gardening baskets were kept, and from the lobby went into the hall. Tea was, as always, laid there and Mrs. Chadwick, as Meg and Oldmeadow came in, was descending the staircase at the further end, leaning on Adrienne Toner’s arm.

“You see. She’s done it!” Meg murmured. She seemed to bear him no ill-will for his expressed aversion. “I never knew one of Mother’s headaches go so quickly.”

“I expect she’d rather have stayed quietly upstairs,” said Oldmeadow; “she looks puzzled. As if she didn’t know what had happened to her.”

“Like a rabbit when it comes out of the conjuror’s hat,” said the irreverent daughter.

That was precisely what poor Eleanor Chadwick did look like and for the moment his mind was diverted by amusement at her appearance from its bitter preoccupation. Mrs. Chadwick was the rabbit and Miss Toner was the conjuror indeed; bland and secure and holding her trophy in a firm but gentle grasp. Not until they were all seated did Barney and Nancy appear and then it was evident to him that if Miss Toner were jealous of Nancy she did not fear her, for it was she who had arranged the walk from which the young couple had just returned.

“Was it lovely?” she asked Barney, as he took the place beside her. “Oh, I do wish I could have come; but I knew your Mother needed me.”

“The primroses are simply ripping in the wood,” said Barney.

Nancy carried a large bunch of primroses.

“Ripping,” said Miss Toner, laughing gently.

“How absurd of you, Barney. Could anything be less ripping than primroses? How beautiful they are and what a lovely bunch. One sees that Miss Averil loves them from the way she has picked them.” If she did not call Nancy by her Christian name it was, Oldmeadow knew, not her but Nancy’s fault.

Nancy still stood beside the table and from the fact of standing, while all the rest of them were seated, from the fact of being called Miss Averil, she seemed, for the moment, oddly an outsider; as if she hardly belonged to the circle of which Miss Toner was the centre. “Do come and sit near us,” said Miss Toner. “For I had to miss you, too, you see, as well as the primroses.”

“I’d crowd you there,” said Nancy, smiling. “I’ll sit here near Aunt Eleanor.” From something in her eyes Oldmeadow felt suddenly sure that not till now had she realized that it had not, really, been her and Barney’s walk. She offered the primroses to Mrs. Chadwick as she took the chair beside her, saying, “They’ll fill your white bowl in the morning-room, Aunt Eleanor.”

“Oh, I say; but I meant those for Adrienne, Nancy!” Barney exclaimed, and as he did so Meg’s eyes met Oldmeadow’s over the household loaf. “She didn’t see them in the wood, so she ought to have them. Mummy is suffocated with primroses already.”

But Nancy showed no rash and only an acute Meg could have guessed a cut as she answered: “I’ll pick another bunch to-morrow for Miss Toner, Barney. They’ll be fresher to take to London. These are really Aunt Eleanor’s. I always fill that bowl for her.”

CHAPTER VII

“I DO so want a talk with you, Roger,” Mrs. Chadwick murmured to him when tea was over. The dining-room opened at one end of the hall and the drawing-room at the other and the morning-room, Mrs. Chadwick’s special retreat, into which she now drew him, was tucked in behind the dining-room and looked out at an angle of the garden wall and at the dove-cot that stood there. Mrs. Chadwick’s doves were usually fluttering about the window and even, when it was open, entering the room, where she sometimes fondly fed them, causing thereby much distress of mind to Turner, the good old parlourmaid. A pleasant little fire was burning there and, after placing her primroses in the white bowl, Mrs. Chadwick drew her chair to it, casting a glance, as she did so, up at the large portrait of her husband in hunting dress that hung above the mantelpiece. It was painted with the same glib unintelligence as the dining-room portraits, but the painter had been unable to miss entirely the whimsical daring of the eyes or to bring into conformity with his own standard of good looks the charm of the irregular and narrow face. Francis Chadwick had been an impulsive, idle, endearing man, and, remaining always in love with his wife, had fondly cherished all her absurdities. Since his death poor Mrs. Chadwick had been perplexed by her effort to associate with gravity and inspiration one who had always been a laughing incentive to inconsequence. Oldmeadow reflected, as he, too, looked up at him, that Francis Chadwick would neither have needed nor have liked Miss Toner.

“It’s so very, very strange, Roger, I really must tell you,” Mrs. Chadwick said. Her hair, still bright and abundant, was very untidy. She had evidently not brushed it since rising from her sofa. “I had one of my dreadful headaches, you know. It came on at church this morning and I really couldn’t attend to Mr. Bodman at all. Perhaps you saw.”

“I heard. Yes. Miss Toner had disturbed you a good deal.”

“I did feel so bewildered and unhappy about it all,” said Mrs. Chadwick, fixing her blue eyes upon the family friend. Eleanor Chadwick’s eyes could show the uncanny ingenuousness and the uncanny wisdom of a baby’s. “Nothing so innocent or so sharp was ever seen outside a perambulator,” her husband had once said of them. “About her, you know, Roger,” she continued, “and Barney and Palgrave. The influence. I could not bear them to lose their faith in the church of their fathers.”

“No,” said Oldmeadow. “But you must be prepared to see it shift a good deal. Faiths have to shift nowadays if they’re to stand.”

“Well. Yes. I know what you mean, Roger. But it isn’t a question of shifting, is it? I’m very broad. I’ve always been all for breadth. And the broader you are the firmer you ought to be, oughtn’t you?”

“Well, Miss Toner’s broad and firm,” Oldmeadow suggested. “I never saw anyone more so.”

“But in such a queer way, Roger. Like saying one’s prayers out of doors and thinking oneself as good as Christ. Oh, it all made me perfectly wretched and after lunch my head was so bad that I went and lay down in the dark; and it raged, simply. Oh, dear, I thought; this means a day and night of misery. They go on like that once they begin. Mamma used to have them in precisely the same way. Absolutely incapacitating. I can never see how anybody can deny heredity. That’s another point, Roger. I’ve always accepted evolution. I gave up Adam and Eve long ago; gave them up as white and good-looking, I mean; because we must have begun *somewhere*, mustn’t we? And Darwin was such a good man; though you remember he came not to care anything at all about music. That may mean a great deal, if one could think it all out; it’s the most religious of the arts, isn’t it? But there’s no end to thinking things out!” Mrs. Chadwick pressed her hand against her forehead, closing her eyes for a moment. “And Adrienne is very musical.”

“You were at your headache,” Oldmeadow reminded her. It was customary in the family circle thus to shepherd Mrs. Chadwick’s straying thoughts.

“Yes, I know. But it all hangs together. Heredity and Mamma and my headaches; and Adrienne’s mother, who was musical, too, and played on a harp. Well, it was raging and I was lying there, when there came a little rap at the door. I knew at once who it was and she asked in such a gentle voice if she might come in. It’s a very soothing voice, isn’t it? But do you know I felt for a moment quite frightened, as if I simply couldn’t see her. But I had to say yes, and she came in so softly and sat down beside me and said: ‘I used to help Mother, sometimes, with her headaches. May I help you?’ She didn’t want to talk about things, as I’d feared. Such a relief it was. So I said: ‘Oh, do my dear,’ and she laid her hand on my forehead and said: ‘You will soon feel better. It will soon quite pass away.’ And then not another word. Only sitting there in the dark, with her hand on my forehead. And do you know, Roger, almost at once the pain

began to melt away. You know how a dish of junket melts after you cut into it. It was like that. 'Junket, junket,' I seemed to hear myself saying; and such a feeling of peace and contentment. And before I knew anything more I fell into the most delicious sleep and slept till now, just before tea. She was sitting there still, in the dark beside me and I said: 'Oh, my dear, to think of your having stayed in on this lovely afternoon!' But she went to pull up the blinds and said that she loved sitting quietly in the dark with some one she cared for, sleeping. 'I think souls come very close together, then,' she said. Wasn't it beautiful of her, Roger? Like astral bodies, you know, and auras and things of that sort. She *is* beautiful. I made up my mind to that, then. She gives me such a feeling of trust. How can one help it? It's like what one reads of Roman Catholic saints and people in the Bible. The gift of healing. The laying on of hands. We don't seem to have any of them and we can't count *her*, since she doesn't believe in the church. But if only they'd give up the Pope, I don't see why we shouldn't accept their saints; such dear, good people, most of them. And the Pope is quite an excellent man just now, I believe. But isn't it very strange, Roger? For a person who can do that to one can't be irreligious, can they?"

Mrs. Chadwick's eye was now fixed upon him, less wistfully and more intently, and he knew that something was expected of him.

"Hypnotic doctors can do it, you know. You needn't be a saint to do it," he said. "Though I suppose you must have some power of concentration that implies faith. However," he had to say all his thought, though most of it would be wasted upon poor Eleanor Chadwick, "Miss Toner is anything but irreligious. You may be sure of that."

"You feel it, too, Roger. I'm so, so glad."

"But her religion is not as your religion," he had to warn her, "nor her ways your ways. You must be prepared to have the children unsettled; everyone of them; because she has great power and is far more religious than most people. She believes in her creed and acts on it. You must give the children their heads. It's no good trying to circumvent or oppose them."

"But they mustn't do wrong things, Roger. How can I give them their heads if it's to do wrong things? I don't know what Mamma would have said to their not going to church—especially in the country. She would have thought it very wrong, simply. Sinful and dangerous."

"Hardly that," Oldmeadow smiled. "Even in the country. You don't think Miss Toner does wrong things. If they take up Miss Toner's creed instead of going to church, they won't come to much harm. The principal thing is that there should be something to take up. After all," he was reassuring himself as well as Mrs. Chadwick, "it hasn't hurt her. It's made her a little foolish; but it hasn't hurt her. And your children will never be foolish. They'll get all the good of it and, perhaps, be able to combine it with going to church.

"Foolish, Roger?" Mrs. Chadwick, relieved of her headache, but not of her perplexity, gazed wanly at him. "You think Adrienne foolish?"

"A little. Now and then. You mustn't accept anything she says to you just because she can cure you of a headache."

"But how can you say foolish, Roger? She's had a most wonderful education?"

"Everything that makes her surer of herself and makes other people surer of her puts her in more danger of being foolish. One can be too sure of oneself. Unless one is a saint—and even then. And though I don't think she's irreligious I don't think she's a saint. Not by any means."

"I don't see how anyone can be more of one, nowadays, Roger. She heals people and she says prayers, and she is always good and gentle and never thinks of herself. I'm sure I can't think what you want more."

A touch of plaintiveness and even of protest had come into Mrs. Chadwick's voice.

"Perhaps what I want is less," he laughed. "Perhaps she's too much of a saint for my taste. I think she's a little too much of one for your taste, really—if you were to be quite candid with yourself. Has she spoken to you at all about Barney? Are you quite sure you'll have to reckon with her for yourself and the children?"

At this Mrs. Chadwick showed a frank alarm. "Oh, quite, quite sure!" she said. "She couldn't be so lovely to us all if she didn't mean to take him! Why do you ask, Roger? You haven't any reason for thinking she won't?"

"None whatever. Quite the contrary." He didn't want to put poor Mrs. Chadwick to the cruel test of declaring whether she would rather have the children go to church and lose Miss Toner and all her money or have them stay away and keep Miss Toner. After all such a test was not to be asked of her. Miss Toner wanted people to follow their own light. "I only wondered if she talked to you about him. Asked any girlish leading questions."

"None, none whatever," said Mrs. Chadwick. "But I feel that's because she thinks she knows him far better than I do and that he's told her everything already. It's rather hard to be a mother, Roger. For of course, though she is so much better and cleverer than I am, I feel sure that no one understands Barney as I do."

"She'd be a little cleverer still if she could see that, wouldn't she?"

"Well, I don't know. Girls never do. I was just the same when I was engaged to Francis. Even now I can't think that old Mrs. Chadwick really understood him as I did. It's very puzzling, isn't it? Very difficult to see things from other people's point of view. When she pulled up the blind this afternoon, she told me that Nancy and Barney were down in the copse and she seemed pleased."

"Oh, did she?"

"I told her that they'd always been like brother and sister, for I was just a little afraid, you know, that she might imagine Barney had ever cared about Nancy."

"I see. You think she wouldn't like that?"

"What woman would, Roger?" And he imagined that Mrs. Chadwick, for all her folly, was cleverer than Miss Toner guessed, as she added: "And then she told me that she'd made Barney go without her. She wanted me to see, you know, that it depended on her. That's another reason why I feel sure she is going to take him."

CHAPTER VIII

He sat, for the first time, next Miss Toner that night at dinner and Nancy sat across from them next Barney. Nancy was pale, and now that he could scrutinize her he imagined that the walk had been more of an ordeal than a pleasure. Barney, no doubt, with the merciless blindness of his state, had talked to her all the time of Adrienne. But Nancy would not have minded that. She was of the type that hides its cut for ever and may become aunt and guardian-angel to the other woman's children. It had not been Barney's preoccupation that had so drained her of warmth and colour, but its character, its object. Her grey eyes had the considering look with which they might have measured the height of a difficult hedge in hunting, and, resting on Oldmeadow once or twice, seemed to tell him that the walk had shown her more clearly than ever that, if Barney married Miss Toner, they must lose him. He felt sure that she had lain down since tea with a headache to which had come no ministering angel.

She and Barney did not talk to each other now, for he had eyes and ears only for Miss Toner. At any former time they would have kept up the happiest interchange, and Oldmeadow would have seen Nancy's eyelashes close together as she smiled her loving smile. There was a dim family likeness between her face and Barney's, for both were long and narrow, and both had the singular sweetness in the very structure of the smile. But where Barney was clumsy, Nancy was clear, and her skin was as fair as his was brown. To the fond onlooker at both, they were destined mates and only an insufferable accident had parted them.

Nancy was as much a part of the Coldbrooks country as the primroses and the blackcaps in the woods. Her life had risen from the familiar soil to the familiar sky, as preordained to fitness, as ordered by instinct and condition as theirs, and from her security of type she had gained not lost in savour. The time that unfinished types must give to growing conscious roots and building conscious nests, Nancy had all free for spontaneities of flight and song. Beside her, to his hostile eye, Miss Toner was as a wide-spread water-weed, floating, rootless and scentless, upon chance currents: A creature of surfaces, of caprice and hazard. If the multiplicity of her information constituted mental wealth, its impersonality constituted mental poverty. She was as well furnished and as deadening as a catalogue, and as he listened to her, receiving an impression of continual, considered movings-on, earnest pursuits, across half the globe, of further experience, he saw her small, questing figure on a background of railways, giant lines stretching forth across plain and mountain, climbing, tunnelling, curving; stopping at great capitals, and passing on again to glitter on their endless way under the sun and moon. That was what he seemed to see as Miss Toner talked: and sleeping-berths and wardrobe-boxes and luxurious suites in vast hotels.

She wore again her white dress, contrasting in its richness of texture with the simplicity of her daytime blue, and, rather stupidly, an artificial white rose had been placed, in her braids, over each ear. Her pearls were her only other ornament, and her pearls, he supposed, were surprising.

Oldmeadow was aware, in his close proximity to her, while she ate beside him with a meticulous nicety that made the manners of the rest of them, by contrast, seem a little casual and slovenly, of the discomfort that had visited him in his dream. Yet the feeling she evoked was not all discomfort. It was as if from her mere physical presence he were subjected to some force that had in its compulsion a dim, conjectural charm. It was for this reason no doubt that he seemed to be aware of everything about her. Her hands were small and white, but had no beauty of form or gesture. She moved them slowly and without grace, rather like a young child handling unfamiliar objects in a kindergarten, and this in spite of the singular perfection of her table manners. She could have made little use of them, ever, in games of skill or in any art requiring swift accuracy and firmness. It was as if her mind, overtrained in receptivity and retentiveness, had only dull tentacles to spare for her finger-tips. He was aware of these hands beside him all through dinner and their fumbling deliberation brought to him, again and again, a mingled annoyance, and satisfaction. There was something positive and characteristic about her scentlessness, for if she smelt of anything it was of Fuller's Earth—a funny, chalky smell—and beside Meg, who foolishly washed liquid powder over her silvery skin, Miss Toner's colourlessness was sallow. She had hardly talked at all the night before, but to-night she talked continuously. It was Meg who questioned her, and Mrs. Chadwick, and Oldmeadow guessed that his ingenuous friend, still perplexed by his use of the word foolish, was drawing out and displaying her future daughter-in-law for his benefit.

Miss Toner and her mother had been to Russia, to India, to China and Japan. They had visited Stevenson's grave at Vailima and in describing it she quoted "Under the wide and starry sky." They had studied every temple in Greece and Sicily and talked of the higher education with ladies in Turkish harems. "But it was always Paris we came back to," she said, "when we were not at home. Home was, and is, a great many places: California and Chicago—where my father's people live, and New England. But Paris was, after it, closest to our hearts. Yes, we knew a great many French people; but it was for study rather than friendship we went there. It is such a treasure-house of culture. Mother worked very hard at French diction for several winters. She had lessons from Mademoiselle Jouffert—you know perhaps—though she has not acted for so many years now. Our friendship with her was a great privilege, for she was a rare and noble woman and had a glorious gift. Phèdre was her favourite rôle and I shall never forget her rendering of it:

> Ariane ma sœur! de quel amour blessée
> Vous mourûtes aux bords où vous fûtes laissée!

She taught Mother to recite Phèdre's great speeches with such fire and passion. There could hardly be a better training for French," said Miss Toner, repeating the lines with a curious placidity and perfection. "I preferred Mademoiselle Jouffert's rendering to Bernhardt's. Her Phèdre was, with all the fire, more tender and womanly."

"Do you care about Racine?" Oldmeadow asked her, while the lines rang in his ears—rather as in his dream the rooks' cawing had done—with an evocative sadness that hung, irrelevantly, about their speaker. "It's not easy for our English ears to hear the fire and passion, is it; but they are there."

"He is very perfect and accomplished," said Miss Toner. "But I always feel him small beside our Shakespeare. He lacks heart, doesn't he?"

"There's heart in those lines you've just recited."

"Yes," said Miss Toner. "Those lines are certainly very beautiful. It's the mere music of them, I think. They make me feel—" she paused. It was unlike her to pause and he wondered what she made of Ariane, off her own bat, without Mademoiselle Jouffert to help her.

"They make you feel?" he questioned.

“They are so sad—so terribly melancholy. The sound of them. They make me want to cry when I hear them. But I think it’s the sound; for their meaning makes me indignant. There is such weakness in them; such acceptance of destiny. I want to revolt and protest, too—for women. She should not have died.”

Oldmeadow involuntarily glanced across at Nancy. She was looking at Miss Toner and if she had been pale before, she was paler now. Nancy would never think of herself in connection with Ariane and tragic grief; yet something in the lines, something in Miss Toner’s disavowal of their applicability, had touched the hidden cut. And, once again, it was Meg’s eyes that met his, showing him that what he saw she saw, too. Barney saw nothing. All his solicitude was for Miss Toner in her imaginary plight. “I’m sure you never would!” he exclaimed. “Never die, I mean!”

“You think Miss Toner would have come to terms with Bacchus,” Oldmeadow suggested. He didn’t want to take it out of Barney, though he was vexed with him, nor to take it out of Miss Toner, either. He only wanted to toss and twist the theme and make it gay where Miss Toner made it solemn.

“Come to terms with Bacchus!” Barney quite stared, taken aback by the irreverence. “Why should she! She’d have found somebody more worth while than either of the ruffians.”

Miss Toner smiled over at him.

“I’m sure that if Bacchus had been fortunate enough to meet Miss Toner she’d have converted him to total abstinence in a jiffy and made a model husband of him. He was a fine, exhilarating fellow; no ruffian at all; quite worth reforming.” Oldmeadow, as he thus embroidered his theme, was indulging in his own peculiar form of mirth.

He saw Miss Toner laying her hand on the head of Bacchus; Miss Toner very picturesque on the rugged sea-shore in her white and pearls and roses, and Bacchus dazed and penitent, his very leopards tamed to a cat-like docility. His laugh was visible rather than audible and that Miss Toner had never before been the subject of such mirth was evident to him.

She met whatever she saw or guessed of irreverence, however, as composedly as she would have met Bacchus; perhaps already, he reflected, she was beginning to think of him in the light of an undesirable wine-bibber. Perhaps even, she was beginning to think of him as a ruffian. He didn’t mind in the least, so long as he succeeded in keeping off her solemnity.

“I should have been quite willing to try and reform him,” she said; “though it takes much longer than a jiffy to reform people, Mr. Oldmeadow; but I shouldn’t have been willing to marry him. There are other things in life, aren’t there, than love-stories—even for women.”

“Bravo!” said Oldmeadow. He felt as well as uttered it. She wasn’t being solemn, and she had returned his shuttlecock smartly. “But are there?” he went on. He had adjusted his eyeglass for a clearer confrontation of her.

Miss Toner’s large eyes, enlarged still further by the glass, met his, not solemnly, but with a considering gravity.

“You are a sceptic, Mr. Oldmeadow,” she observed. “A satirist. Do you find that satire and scepticism take you very far in reading human hearts?”

“There’s one for you, Roger!” cried Barney.

Oldmeadow kept his gaze fixed on Miss Toner. “You think that Ariane might prefer Infant Welfare work or Charity Organization to a love-story?”

“Not those necessarily.” She returned his gaze. “Though I have known very fine big people who did prefer them. But they are not the only alternatives to love-stories.”

“I am sceptical,” said Oldmeadow. “I am, if you like, satirical. I don’t believe there are any alternatives to love-stories; only palliatives to disappointment.”

Barney leaned forward: “Adrienne, you see, doesn’t accept that old-fashioned, sentimentalizing division of the sexes. She doesn’t accept the merely love-story, hearth-side rôle for women.”

“Oh, well,” Oldmeadow played with his fork, smiling with the wryness that accompanied his reluctant sincerities, “I don’t divide the sexes as far as love-stories are concerned. We are all in the same boat. For us, too, Barney, it’s love-story or palliative. You don’t agree? If you were disappointed in love? Hunting? Farming? Politics? Post-Impressionism? Would any of them fill the gap?”

It wasn’t at all the line he had intended the talk to take. He knew that as he glanced across at Nancy. Saying nothing, as if its subject could not concern her, and with a dim little smile, she listened, and he knew that for her, though she wouldn’t die of it, there would be only palliatives. If only Barney, confound him, hadn’t been so charming.

Barney did not know how to answer the last assault, and, boyishly, looked across at his beloved for succour. She gave it instantly.

“Sadness, sorrow, tragedy, even, isn’t despair,” she said. “Barney, I believe, if sorrow overtook him, would mould the rough clay of his occupation to some higher beauty than the beauty he’d lost. To lie down and die; to resign oneself to palliatives. Oh, no. That’s not the destiny of the human soul.”

“Roger’s pulling your leg, Barney, as usual,” Palgrave put in scornfully. He had been listening with his elbows on the table, his eyes on the table-cloth. “He knows as well as I do that there’s only one love. The sort you’re all talking about—the Theseus and Ariane affair—is merely an ebullition of youth and as soon as nature has perpetuated the species by means of it, it settles down, if there’s any reality under the ebullition, to grow into the other—the divine love; the love of the soul for the Good, the True and the Beautiful,” Palgrave declared, growing very red as he said it.

“Really—my dear child!” Mrs. Chadwick murmured. She had never heard such themes broached at her table and glanced nervously up at old Johnson to see if he had followed. “That is a very, very materialistic view!”

Oldmeadow at this began to laugh, audibly as well as visibly, and Palgrave, as their eyes met in a glance of communicated comedy, could not withhold an answering smile. But Barney’s face showed that he preferred to see Palgrave’s interpretation as materialistic and even Miss Toner looked thoughtfully at her champion.

“But we need the symbol of youth and nature,” she suggested. “The divine love, yes, Palgrave, is the only real one; but then all love is divine and human love sometimes brings the deepest revelation of all. Browning saw that so wonderfully.”

“Browning, my dear!” Palgrave returned with a curious mingling of devotion, intimacy and aloofness, “Browning

never got nearer God than a woman's breast!"

At this, almost desperately, Mrs. Chadwick broke in: "Did you ever see our Ellen Terry act, Adrienne? I liked her much better than Madame Bernhardt who had such a very artificial face, I think. I can't imagine her as Rosalind, can you? While Miss Terry was a perfect Rosalind. I met her once with Henry Irving at a garden-party in London and she was as charming off as on the stage and I'm sure I can't see why anybody should wish to act Phèdre—poor, uncontrolled creature. Rhubarb-tart, dear, and custard? or wine-jelly and cream? How beautifully you speak French. How many languages do you speak?" Mrs. Chadwick earnestly inquired, still turning the helm firmly away from the unbecoming topic.

Miss Toner kept her head very creditably and, very tactfully, at once accepted her hostess's hint. "Rhubarb-tart, please, dear Mrs. Chadwick. Not so very many, really. My German has never been good; though French and Italian I do know well, and enough Spanish for Don Quixote. But," she went on, while Mrs. Chadwick looked gratefully at her, "Mother and I were always working. We never wasted any of our precious hours together. She couldn't bear the thought of *missing* anything in life; and she missed very little, I think. Music, poetry, painting—all the treasure-houses of the human spirit—were open to her. And what she won and made her own, she gave out again with greater radiance. How I wish you could all have known her!" said Miss Toner, looking round at them with an unaccustomed touch of wistfulness. "She was radiance personified. She never let unhappiness *rest* on her. I remember once, when she had had a cruel blow from a person she loved and trusted—in the middle of her sadness she looked at me and saw how sad she was making me; and she sprang up and seized my hands and cried: 'Let's dance! Let's dance and dance and dance!' And we did, up and down the terrace—it was at San Remo—she in her white dress, with the blue sky and sea and the orange-trees all in bloom. I can see her now. And then she rushed to get music, her harp, and flowers and fruit, to take to an invalid friend, and we spent the afternoon with her, mother surpassing herself in charm and witchery. She was always like that. She would have found something, oh, very beautiful, to make from her sorrow if Theseus had abandoned her! But no one," said Miss Toner, looking round at Oldmeadow, now with a mild playfulness, "could ever have abandoned Mother."

There was something to Oldmeadow appealing in her playfulness; her confidence, when it took on this final grace, was really touching. For Mrs. Toner the light-giver he knew that he had conceived a rooted aversion. And he wondered if she would go on, over the rhubarb-tart, to tell, after the dancing on the terrace, of the death at sea. But he was spared that.

"And your father died when you were very young, didn't he, dear?" said Mrs. Chadwick, fearful of the reference to Theseus. "I think your mother must often have been so very lonely; away from home for such a great part of the time and with so few relatives."

Miss Toner shook her head. "We were always together, she and I, so we could never, either of us, be lonely. And wherever we went she made friends. People were always so much more than mere people to her. She saw them always, at once, high and low, prince and peasant, as souls, and they felt it always, and opened to her. Then, until I was quite big, we had my lovely grandmother. Mother came from Maine and it was such a joy to go and stay there with Grandma. It was a very simple little home. It was always high thinking and plain living, with Grandma; and though, when she married and became rich, Mother showered beautiful things upon her, Grandma stayed always in the little house, doing for her poor neighbours, as she had always done, and dusting her parlour—a real New England parlour—and making her own griddle cakes—such wonderful cakes she made! I was fifteen when she died; but the tie was so close and spiritual that she did not seem gone away from us."

CHAPTER IX

"RATHER nice to think that there are so many good and innocent people in the world, isn't it," Barney remarked, when he, Palgrave and Oldmeadow were left to their wine and cigars. It was evident that he would have preferred to omit the masculine interlude, but Oldmeadow was resolved on the respite. She had touched him because she was so unaware; but he was weary and disconcerted. How could Barney be unaware? And was he? Altogether? His comment seemed to suggest a suspicion that Miss Toner's flow might have aroused irony or require justification.

"Miss Toner and her mother seem to have found the noble and the gifted under every bush," he remarked, and he was not sure that he wished to avoid irony though he knew that he did wish to conceal it from Barney. "It's very good and innocent to be able to do that; but one may keep one's goodness at the risk of one's discrimination. Not that Miss Toner is at all stupid."

Palgrave neither smoked nor drank. He had again leaned his elbows on the table and his head on his fists, but, while Oldmeadow spoke, he lifted and kept his gaze on him. "You don't like her," he said suddenly. He and Oldmeadow had, irrepressibly, over Mrs. Chadwick's conception of materialism, interchanged their smile at dinner; but since the morning Oldmeadow had known that Palgrave suspected him of indifference, perhaps even hostility, towards the new-comer. "Why don't you like her?" the boy went on and with a growing resentment as his suspicions found voice. "She *isn't* stupid; that's just it. She's good and noble and innocent; and gifted, too. Why should we pretend to be too sophisticated to recognize such beauty when we meet it? Why should we be ashamed of beauty—afraid of it?"

Barney, flushing deeply, looked down into his wine-glass.

"My dear Palgrave, I don't understand you," said Oldmeadow. But he did. He seemed to hear the loud beating of Palgrave's heart. "I don't dislike Miss Toner. How should I? I don't know her."

"You do know her. That's an evasion. It's all there. She can't be seen without being known. It's all there; at once. I don't know why you don't like her. It's what I want to know."

"Drop it, Palgrave," Barney muttered. "Let Roger alone. He and Adrienne get on very well together. It's no good forcing things."

"I'm not forcing anything. It's Roger who forces his scepticism and his satire on us," Palgrave declared.

"I'm sorry to have displeased you," said Oldmeadow with a slight severity. "I am unaware of having displayed

my disagreeable qualities more than is usual with me."

"Of course not. What rot, Palgrave! Roger is always disagreeable, bless him!" Barney declared with a forced laugh. "Adrienne understands him perfectly. As he says: she isn't stupid."

"Oh, all right. I'm sorry," Palgrave rose, thrusting his hands in his pockets and looking down at the two as he stood above them. He hesitated and then went on: "All I know is that for the first time in my life—the very first time, mind you—all the things we are told about in religion, all the things we read about in poetry, the things we're supposed to care for and live by, have been made real to me—outside of books and churches. What do we ever see of them at home here, with dear Mummy and the girls? What do we ever talk of, all of us—but the everlasting round—hunting, gardening, cricket, hay; village treats and village charities. A lot of chatter about people—What a rotter So-and-so is; and How perfectly sweet somebody else: and a little about politics—Why doesn't somebody shoot Lloyd George?—and How wicked Home Rulers are. That's about all it amounts to. Oh, I know we're not as stupid as we sound. *She* sees that. We can feel things and see things though we express ourselves like savages. But we're too comfortable to think; that's what's the trouble with us. We don't want to change; and thought means change. And we're shy; idiotically shy; afraid to express anything as it really comes to us; so that I sometimes wonder if things will go on coming; if we shan't become like the Chinese—a sort of *objet d'art* set of people, living by rote, in a rut. Well. That's all I mean. With her one isn't ashamed or afraid to know and say what one feels. With her one wants to feel more. And I, for one, reverence her and am grateful to her for having made beauty and goodness real to me." Having so delivered himself, Palgrave, who had, after his deep flush, become pale, turned away and marched out of the room.

The older men sat silent for a moment, Oldmeadow continuing to smoke and Barney turning the stem of his wine-glass in his fingers. "I'm awfully sorry," he said at last. "I can't think what's got into the boy. He's in rather a moil just now, I fancy."

"He's a dear boy," said Oldmeadow. "There's any amount of truth in what he says. He's at an age when one sees these things, if one is ever going to see them. I hope he'll run straight. He ought to amount to something."

"That's what Adrienne says," said Barney. "She says he's a poet. You think, too, then, that we're all in such a rut; living Chinese lives; automata?"

"It's the problem of civilization, isn't it, to combine automatism with freedom. Without a rut to walk in you reach nowhere—if we're to walk together. And yet we must manage to ramble, too; individuals must; that's what it comes to, I suppose. Individuals must take the risk of rambling and alter the line of the rut for the others. Palgrave may be a rambler. But I hope he won't go too far afield."

"You do like her, Roger, don't you?" said Barney suddenly.

It had had to come. Oldmeadow knew that, as the depth of silence fell about them. It was inevitable between them, of course. Yet he wished it might have been avoided, since now it must be too late. He pressed out the glow of his cigar and leaned his arms on the table, not looking at his friend while he meditated, and he said finally—and it might seem, he knew, another evasion—"Look here, Barney, I must tell you something. You know how much I care about Nancy. Well, that's the trouble. It's Nancy I wanted you to marry."

Barney had held himself ready and a deep, involuntary sigh of relief, or of postponed suspense, now escaped him. "I see. I didn't realize that," he said. And how he hoped, poor Barney! it was all there was to realize! "Of course I'm very fond of Nancy."

"You realize, of course, how fond she is of you."

"Well; yes; of course. We're both awfully good pals," said Barney, confused.

"That's what Palgrave would call speaking like a savage, Barney. Own to it that if Miss Toner hadn't appeared upon the scene you could have hoped to make Nancy your wife. I don't say you made love to her or misled her in any way. I'm sure you never meant to at any rate. But the fact remains that you were both so fond of each other that you would certainly have married. So you'll understand that when I come down here and find Miss Toner installed as tutelary goddess over you all, what I'm mainly conscious of is grief for my dear little relegated nymph."

Still deeply flushed, but still feeling his relief, Barney turned his wine-glass and murmured: "I see. I quite understand. Yes; I should have been in love with her, I own. I nearly was, last winter. As to her being in love with me, that's a different matter. I've no reason to think she was in love. It would just be a difference of degree, with Nancy, wouldn't it; she loves us all so much, and she's really such a child, still. Of course that's what she seems to me now, since Adrienne's come; just a darling child."

"I suppose so. But you understand what I feel, too. I feel her much more than a darling child, and it's difficult for me to like anybody who has dispossessed her. I perfectly recognize Miss Toner's remarkable qualities and hope to count myself among her friends one day; but, being a satirist and a sceptic, I rebel instinctively against goddesses of whatever brand. Nymphs are good enough for me; and I can't help wishing, irrepressibly, that nymphs had remained good enough for you, my dear boy."

"It isn't a question of nymphs; it isn't a question of goddesses," Barney said, glancing up now at his friend. "I'm awfully sorry about Nancy; but of course she'll find some one far better than I am; she's such a dear. You're not quite straight with me, Roger. I don't see Adrienne as a goddess at all; I'm not like Palgrave, a silly boy, bowled over. It's something quite different she does to me. She makes me feel safe; safe and happy in a way I never imagined possible. It's like having the sunlight fall about one; it's like life, new life, to be with her. She's not a goddess; but she's the woman it would break my heart to part with. I never met such loveliness."

"My dear boy," Oldmeadow murmured. He still leaned on the table and he still looked down. "I do wish you every happiness, as you know." He was deeply touched and Barney's quiet words troubled him as he had not before been troubled.

"Thanks. I know you do. I know you care for my happiness. And I can't imagine anything coming into my life that would make a difference to us. That's just it." Barney paused. "It won't, will it, Roger?"

The crisis was again upon them. Oldmeadow did not look up as he said: "That depends on her, doesn't it?"

"No; it depends on you," Barney quickly replied.

"She likes you, quite immensely, already. She says you make her think of one of Meredith's dry, deep-hearted heroes," Barney gave a slightly awkward laugh, deprecating the homage as he offered it. "She says you are the soul

of truth. There's no reason, none whatever, why you shouldn't be the best of friends, as far as she is concerned. It's all she asks."

"It's all I ask, of course."

"Yes, I know. But if you don't meet her half-way? Sometimes I do see what Palgrave means. Sometimes you misunderstand her."

"Very likely. It takes time really to understand people, doesn't it."

But poor Barney was embarked and could not but push on. "As just now, you know, about finding nobility behind every bush and paying for one's goodness by losing one's discrimination. There are deep realities and superficial realities, aren't there, and she sees the deep ones first. It's more than that. Palgrave says she makes reality. He didn't say it to me, because I don't think he feels me to be worthy of her. He said it to Mother, and puzzled her by it. But I know what he means. It's because of that he feels her to be a sort of saint. Do be straight with me, Roger. Say what you really think. I'd rather know; much. You've never kept things from me before," Barney added in a sudden burst of boyish distress.

"My dear Barney," Oldmeadow murmured.

It had to come, then. He pushed back his chair and turned in it, resting an arm on the table; and he passed his hand over his head and kept it there while he stared for a moment hard at the ceiling.

"I think you've made a mistake," he then said.

"A mistake?" Barney faltered blushing. It was not anger; it was pain, simple, boyish pain that thus confessed itself.

"Yes; a mistake," Oldmeadow repeated, not looking at him, "and since I fear it's gone too far to be mended, I think it would have been better if you'd not pressed me, my dear boy."

"How do you mean? I'd rather know, you see," Barney murmured, after a moment.

"I don't mean about the goodness, or the power," said Oldmeadow. "She is good, and she has power; but that's in part, I feel, because she has no inhibitions—no doubts. To know reality we must do more than blow soap-bubbles with it. It must break us to be known. She's never been broken. Perhaps she never will be. And in that case she'll go on blind."

Barney was silent for a moment, and that it was not as bad as he had feared it might be was apparent from the attempted calm with which he asked, presently: "Why shouldn't you be blind to evil and absurdity if you can see much further than most people into goodness? Perhaps one must be one-sided to go far."

"Perhaps. But it's dangerous to be one-sided—to oneself and others. And does she see further? That's the question. Doesn't she tend, rather, to accept as first-rate what you incline to find second? You're less strong than she is, Barney, and less good, no doubt. But you can't deny that you're less blind. So what you must ask yourself is whether you can be sure of being happy with a wife who'll never doubt herself and who'll not see absurdity where you see it. Put it at that. Will you be happy with her?"

He was, he knew, justified of Miss Toner's commendation, for truth between friends could go no further and, in the silence, while he sickened for his friend, he felt it searching Barney's heart. How it searched, how many echoes it found awaiting it, was proved by the prolongation of the silence.

"I think you exaggerate," said Barney at length, and in the words Oldmeadow read his refusal to examine further the truths revealed to him. "You see all the defects and none of the beauty. It can't be a mistake if I can see both. She'll learn a little from me, that's what it comes to, for all the lot I'll have to learn from her. I'll be happy with her if I'm worthy of her. What it comes to, you see, as I said at the beginning, is that I can't be happy without her." He rose and Oldmeadow, rising also, knew that they closed upon an unresolved discord. Yet these final words of Barney's pleased him so much that he could not leave it quite at that.

"Mine may be the mistake, after all," he said. "Only you must give me time to find it out. I began by telling you I couldn't be really dispassionate; and I feel much better for our talk, if that's any satisfaction to you. If you can learn from each other and see the truth together, you'll be happy. You're right there, Barney. That is what it comes to." They moved towards the door. "Try not to dislike me for my truth too much," he added.

"My dear old fellow," Barney muttered. He laid his hand for a moment on his friend's shoulder, standing back for him to pass first. "Nothing can ever alter things between you and me."

But things were altered already.

CHAPTER X

Palgrave had not gone to the drawing-room, and that, at all events, was a comfort. A wood fire burned on the hearth and near it Nancy was holding wool for Mrs. Chadwick to wind. Barbara had been sent to bed and Meg and Miss Toner sat on the sofa hand in hand. Even in the pressure of his distress and anxiety Oldmeadow could but be aware of amusement at seeing Meg thus. It had, of course, been Miss Toner who had taken her hand. But no one else could have taken it. No one else could have been allowed to go on holding it placidly before on-lookers of whose mirthful impressions Meg must be well aware. She didn't mind in the least. That was what Miss Toner had done to her. She enjoyed having her hand held by anyone so much interested in her.

Barney walked to the fireplace and stood before it. He had no faculty for concealing his emotions and the painful ones through which he had just passed were visible on his sensitive face.

"Give us a song, Meg," Oldmeadow suggested. He did not care for Meg's singing, which conveyed, in a rich, sweet medium, a mingled fervour and shallowness of feeling. But to hear her sing would be better than to see her holding Miss Toner's hand.

Barney crossed at once to the seat Meg vacated and dropped down into it, no doubt thanking his friend for what he imagined to be a display of tact, and Oldmeadow saw the quiet, firm look that flowed over and took possession of him. Miss Toner knew, of course, that Barney had been having painful emotions; and she probably knew that they

had been caused by the dry, deep-hearted Meredithian hero. But after the long look she did not speak to him. She sat in her pearls and whiteness and gave careful attention to the music.

Oldmeadow accompanied Meg, tolerantly, and a trifle humorously, throwing a touch of mockery into his part. Meg's preference to-night seemed to be for gardens; Gardens of Sleep; Gardens of Love; God's Gardens. "What a wretch you are, Roger," she said, when she had finished. "You despise feeling."

"I thought I was wallowing in it," Oldmeadow returned. "Did I stint you?"

"No; you helped me to wallow. That's why you're such a wretch. Always showing one that one is wallowing when one thinks one's soaring. It's your turn, now, Adrienne. Let's see if he'll manage to make fun of you."

"Does Miss Toner sing, too? Now do you know, Meg," said Oldmeadow, keeping up the friendly banter, "I'm sure she doesn't sing the sort of rubbish you do."

"I think they're beautiful songs," Mrs. Chadwick murmured from her wool, "and I think Roger played them most beautifully. Why should you say he is making fun of you, Meg?"

"Because he makes you think something's beautiful that he thinks rubbish, Mummy. Come along, Adrienne. You will, won't you? I expect my voice sounds all wrong to you. I've had no proper training."

"It's a very lovely voice, Meg, used in a poor cause," said Miss Toner smiling. "And it is badly placed. I think I could help you there. I've no voice at all, but I have been taught how to sing. It would be more to the point, though, if Mr. Oldmeadow were to play to us, for I hear that he is an accomplished musician."

"I'm really anything but accomplished," said Oldmeadow; "but I can play accompaniments cleverly. Do sing to us. I know you'll give us something worth accompanying."

Miss Toner rose and came to the piano with her complete and unassuming confidence. She turned the pages of the music piled there and asked him if he cared for Schubert's songs. Yes; she was a watch wound to go accurately and she could rely on herself, always, to the last tick. Even if she knew—and he was sure she knew—that he had been undermining her, she would never show a shadow or a tremor; and she would always know what was the best music. Only, as she selected "Litanei" and placed it before him, he felt that over him, also, flowed the quiet, firm look.

"Litanei" was one of his favourites in a composer he loved, and, as she sang there above him, he found the song emerging unharmed from her interpretation. It was as she had said—no voice to speak of; the dryest, flattest little thread of sound; and no feeling, either (what a relief after Meg!), except the feeling for scrupulous accuracy. Yet her singing was what he found in her to like best. It was disciplined; it accepted its own limits; it fulfilled an order. There was no desecration of the heavenly song, for, intelligently after all, she made no attempt upon its heart.

When she had finished, she looked down at him. They were removed by half the length of the room from the fireside group. The lamps were behind them. Only the candles set in the piano-rack illumined Miss Toner; and while the white roses over her ears struck him anew as foolish, her eyes anew struck him as powerful.

"Thank you. That was a pleasure," he said.

It was a pleasure. It was almost a link. He had found a ground to meet her on. He saw himself in the future accompanying Barney's wife. He need, then, so seldom talk to her. But, alas! she stepped at once from the safe frame of art.

"If we can rise from loss to feel like that, if we can lift our sorrows like that, we need never turn to palliatives, need we, Mr. Oldmeadow?" she said.

Stupidity, complacency, or power, whatever it was, it completely disenchanted him. It left him also bereft of repartee. What he fell back upon, as he looked up at her and then down at the keys again, was a mere schoolboy mutter of "Come now!"

After all a schoolboy mutter best expressed what he felt. She was not accustomed to having her ministrations met with such mutters and she did not like it. That was apparent to him as she turned away and went back to the sofa and Barney. She had again tried him and again found him wanting.

. . . . . .

Barney and Miss Toner left in her motor next morning shortly after breakfast, and though with his friend Oldmeadow had no further exchange, he had, with Miss Toner, a curious encounter that was, he felt sure, a direct result of her impressions of the night before. They met in the dining-room a few moments before breakfast, and as she entered, wearing already her motoring hat, closely bound round her face with a veil, he was aware that she looked, if that were possible, more composed than he had ever seen her. He felt sure that she had waited for her opportunity, and had followed him downstairs, knowing that she would find him alone; and he realized then that she was more composed, because she had an intention or, rather, since it was more definite, a determination. Determination in her involved no effort: it imparted, merely, the added calm of an assured aim.

She gave him her hand and said good morning with the same air of scrupulous accuracy that she had given to the rendering of "Litanei" and then, standing before the fire, her hands clasped behind her, her eyes raised to his, she said: "Mr. Oldmeadow, I want to say something to you."

It was the gentle little voice, unaltered, yet he knew that he was in for something he would very much rather have avoided; something with anybody else unimaginable, but with her, he saw it now, quite inevitable. Yet he tried, even at this last moment, to avoid it and said, adjusting his eyeglass and moving to the sideboard: "But not before we've had our tea, surely. Can't I get you some? Will you trust me to pour it out?"

"Thanks; I take coffee—not tea," said Miss Toner from her place at the fire, "and neither has been brought in yet."

He had just perceived, to his discomfiture, that they had not. There was nothing for it but to turn from the ungarnished sideboard and face her again.

"It's about Barney, Mr. Oldmeadow," Miss Toner said, unmoved by his patent evasion. "It's because I know you love Barney and care for his happiness. And it's because I hope that you and I are to be friends, and friendship can only be built on truth. Try to trust more; will you? That's all I want to say. Try to trust. You will be happier if you do and make other people happier."

Oldmeadow had never experienced such an assault upon his personality, and he met it gagged and bound, for,

assuredly, this was to be Barney's wife. A slow flush mounted to his face.

"I'm afraid I seem very strange and unconventional to you," Adrienne Toner went on. "You've lived in a world where people don't care enough for each other to say the real things. They must be felt if they've to be said, mustn't they? Yet you do care for people. I have seen that, watching you here; and you care for real things. It's a crust of caution and convention that is about you. You are afraid of expression. You are afraid of feeling. You are afraid of being taken in and of wasting yourself. Don't be afraid, Mr. Oldmeadow. We never lose ourselves by trusting. We never lose ourselves by giving. It's a realer self that comes. And with you, I see it clearly, if you let the crust grow thicker, it will shut life and light and joy away from you; and when light cannot visit our hearts, they wither within us. That is your danger. I want to be your friend, so I must say the truth to you."

He knew, though he had to struggle not to laugh, that he was very angry and that he must not show anger; though it would really be better to show that than his intense amusement; and it took him a moment, during which they confronted each other, to find words; dry, donnish words; words of caution and convention. They were the only ones he had available for the situation. "My dear young lady," he said, "you take too much upon yourself."

She was not in the least disconcerted. She met his eyes steadily. "You mean that I am presumptuous, Mr. Oldmeadow?"

"You take too much upon yourself," he repeated. "As you say, I hope we may be friends."

"Is that really all, Mr. Oldmeadow?" she said, looking at him with such a depth of thoughtfulness that he could not for the life of him make out whether she found him odious or merely pitiful.

"Yes; that's really all," he returned.

The dining-room was very bright and the little blue figure before the fire was very still. The moment fixed itself deep in his consciousness with that impression of stillness and brightness. It was an uncomfortable impression. Her little face, uplifted to his, absurd, yet not uncharming, was, in its still force, almost ominous.

"I'm sorry," was all she said, and she turned and went forward to greet Mrs. Chadwick.

CHAPTER XI

It was a soft June day and Oldmeadow was strolling about Mrs. Averil's garden admiring her herbaceous borders. It was a day that smelt of ripening strawberries, of warm grass and roses, and the air was full of a medley of bird voices, thrushes and blackbirds, sweet as grass and strawberries, and the bubbling rattle of the chaffinch as happy as the sunlight.

Adrienne Toner was Mrs. Chadwick now, and she and Eleanor Chadwick and Barney were motoring together in the French Alps. Coldbrooks was empty, and he had come to stay with Nancy and her mother.

They lived in a small stone house with a Jacobean front that looked, over a stone wall, at Chelford Green, and had behind it a delightfully unexpected length of lawn and orchard and kitchen-garden, all enclosed by higher walls and presided over by a noble cedar. Seen from the garden The Little House was merely mid-Victorian, but the modern additions were masked by climbing roses and a great magnolia-tree opened its lemon-scented cups at the highest bedroom windows. The morning-room was in the modern part, and from one of its windows, presently, Mrs. Averil emerged, opening her sunshade as she crossed the grass to join her guest. She wore a white straw garden hat, tipping over her eyes and tying, behind, over her thick knot of hair, in a manner that always recalled to Oldmeadow a lady out of Trollope. Her face was pale, like Nancy's, and her eyes grey; but rather than blackcaps and primroses she suggested lace tippets and porcelain tea-sets, and though it was from her Nancy had her pretty trick of closing her eyes when she smiled, Mrs. Averil's smile was cogitative and impersonal, and in her always temperate mirth there was an edge of grimness.

"Well, Roger, I want to hear what you thought about the wedding," she said. She had not gone to church that morning with Nancy and it was, he knew, because she wanted an interchange of frank impressions. She had been prevented from attending Miss Toner's London nuptials by a touch of influenza and, as she now went on to say, she had got little from Nancy, who had no eye for pageants and performances. "Eleanor was so absorbed," she went on, "in the fact that the Bishop had indigestion and had, at her suggestion, taken magnesia with his breakfast, that I could not get much else out of her. She seemed to have seen the Bishop's symptoms rather than Adrienne and Barney. Now from you I expect all the relevant details."

"Well, if you call it a detail, Nancy was lovely," said Oldmeadow. "She looked like a silver-birch in her white and green."

"And pearls," said Mrs. Averil. "You noticed, of course, the necklaces Adrienne gave them; quite the gift of a princess, yet so innocent and unobtrusive looking, too. She has great taste in such matters. Did she look well? Eleanor did say that she, like the Bishop, was very pale."

"She was pale; but not a bit nervous. She rather looked as if she had been married every day of her life. Nothing ever puts her out, you know. She was very grave and benign; but she wasn't an imposing bride and the wreath of orange-blossoms aged her. Nancy and Meg and Barbara and the Lumley girl aged her, too. She must be older than Barney."

"Yes; she is. A year older. But she's the sort of woman who will wear," said Mrs. Averil, pausing before a bed of rose-trees to snip off a fading flower. "She'll not look very differently at fifty, you know; and her hair is the sort that may never turn grey. I can see her at seventy with those big golden braids and all her teeth. There's something very indestructible about her. Like a doll made of white leather compared to one made of porcelain. She'll last and last," said Mrs. Averil. "She'll outlast us all. Barney was radiant, of course."

"Yes. But he *was* nervous; like a little boy frightened by the splendour of his Christmas-tree. He looked as though he were arm in arm with the Christmas-tree itself as he came down the nave. A rather dumpy little Christmas-tree, but exquisitely lighted and garnished."

"Well, he ought to be radiant," Mrs. Averil observed. "With all that money, it's an extremely good match for him.

The fact of her being nobody in particular makes no difference, really, since she's an American. And she has, I gather, no tiresome relations to come bothering."

"She's very unencumbered, certainly. There's something altogether very solitary about her," Oldmeadow agreed, watching Mrs. Averil snip off the withered roses. "I felt that even as she came down the nave on Barney's arm. It's not a bit about the money he's radiant," he added.

"Oh, I know. Of course not. That was only my own gross satisfaction expressing itself. He's as in love as it's possible to be. And with every good reason."

"You took to her as much as they all did, then?"

"That would be rather difficult, wouldn't it? And Barney's reasons would hardly be those of a dry old aunt. She was very nice and kind to Nancy and me and she's evidently going to do everything for them. Barbara's already, you know, been sent to that admirable school that was too expensive for Eleanor; riding and singing and all the rest of it. And Meg's been given a perfect trousseau of fine clothes for her London season. Naturally I don't feel very critically towards her."

"Don't you? Well, if she weren't a princess distributing largess, wouldn't you? After all, she's not given Nancy a trousseau. So why be mute with an old friend?"

"Ah, but she's given her the pearls," said Mrs. Averil. "Nancy couldn't but accept a bridesmaid's gift. And she would give her a trousseau if she wanted it and would take it. However, I'll own, though decency should keep me mute, that I should find myself a little bored if I had to see too much of her. I'm an everyday person and I like to talk about everyday things."

"I can hear her asking you, in answer to that, if there is anything more everyday than the human soul. I wish I could have seen you *aux prises* with her," Oldmeadow remarked. "Did she come down here? Did she like your drawing-room and garden?"

Mrs. Averil's drawing-room and garden lay very near her heart. Eleanor Chadwick sometimes accused her of caring more about her china and her roses than about anything else in the world except Nancy.

"I don't think she saw them; not what I call see," Mrs. Averil now said. "Oh, yes; she came several times and recognized, very appreciatively, the periods of my Queen Anne furniture and my Lowestoft. Beyond their period I don't think she went. She said the garden was old-world," Mrs. Averil added, looking about her and twirling her parasol on her shoulder.

"She would," Oldmeadow agreed. "That's just what she would call it. And she'd call you a true, deep-hearted woman and Nancy a gifted girl. How do she and Nancy hit it off? It's that I want most of all to hear about."

"They haven't much in common, have they?" said Mrs. Averil. "She's never hunted and doesn't, I imagine, know a wren from a hedge-sparrow. She *does* know a skylark when she hears one, for she said 'Hail to thee, blithe spirit' while one was singing. But I felt, somehow, it was like the Queen Anne and the Lowestoft—a question of the label."

Oldmeadow at this began to laugh with an open and indulged mirth. He and Mrs. Averil, at all events, saw eye to eye. "If you'd tie the correct label to the hedge-sparrow she'd know that, too," he said. "Poor girl. The trouble with her isn't that she doesn't know the birds, but that she wouldn't know the poets, either, without their labels. It's a mind made up of labels. No; I don't think it likely that Nancy, who hasn't a label about her, will get much out of her—beyond necklaces."

"I wish Nancy *had* a few labels," said Mrs. Averil. "I wish she could have travelled and studied as Miss Toner—Adrienne that is—has done. She is such a little ignoramus. Adrienne may bore you and me, but Nancy will never interest anyone—except you and me."

It was always amusing to Oldmeadow, if a little sardonically so, to note that any conception of himself as a possible suitor for Nancy had never entered Mrs. Averil's mind. As a friend he was everything a mother could desire; as a match for Nancy almost unimaginable. Well, he could not give a wife even one hunter and he never had had any intention of falling in love with his dear nymph; yet that other people might not do so was a suggestion he repudiated with warmth.

"Oh; in love, yes," Mrs. Averil agreed. "I don't deny that she's very loveable and I hope she may marry well. But that's not the same thing as being interesting, is it? A man may be in love with a woman who doesn't interest him."

"I dispute that statement."

"I'm sure dear Eleanor never interested her husband—devoted to the day of his death as he was. There's something in my idea. To be interesting one must offer something new. If Nancy had been interesting to Barney she would now, I think, have been in Adrienne's place. Not that it would have been a marriage to be desired for either of them."

So he and Mrs. Averil had been thinking the same thoughts.

"And you contend that if Nancy had been to China and read Goethe and Dante in the originals he'd have been interested? I think he was quite sufficiently interested and that if Miss Toner hadn't come barging into our lives he'd have known he was in love."

"Going to China is a figure of speech and stands for all the things she hasn't got and doesn't know. My poor little Nancy. All the same, *she* isn't a bore!" said Mrs. Averil with as near an approach to acerbity as she could show.

"No; she isn't a bore. The things she knows have to be found out, by degrees, through living with her. Barney hasn't been to China, either, so, according to your theory, Nancy didn't find him interesting."

At this Mrs. Averil's eyes met his and, after a moment of contemplation, they yielded up to him the secret they saw to be shared. "If only it were the same for women! But they don't need the new. She's young. She'll get over it. I don't believe in broken hearts. All the same," Mrs. Averil stopped in their walk, ostensibly to examine the growth of a fine pink lupin, "it hasn't endeared Adrienne to me. I'm too *terre-à-terre*, about that, too, not to feel vexation, on Nancy's account. And what I'm afraid of is that she knows she's not endeared to me. That she guesses. She's a bore; but she's not a bit stupid, you know."

"You don't think she's spiteful?" Oldmeadow suggested after a moment, while Mrs. Averil still examined her lupin.

"Dear me, no! I wish she could be! It's that smooth surface of hers that's so tiresome. She's not spiteful. But she's human. She'll want to keep Barney away and Nancy will be hurt."

“Want to keep him away when she’s got him so completely?”

“Something of that sort. I felt it once or twice.”

“My first instinct about her was right, then,” said Oldmeadow. “She’s a bore and an interloper, and she’ll spoil things.”

“Oh, perhaps not. She’ll mend some things. Have you heard about Captain Hayward?”

“Do you mean that stupid, big, tawny fellow? What about him?”

“You may well ask. I’ve been spoken to about him and Meg by more than one person. They are making themselves conspicuous, and it’s been going on for some time.”

“You don’t mean that Meg’s in love with him?”

“He’s in love with her, at all events, and, as you know, he’s a married man. I questioned Nancy, who was with Meg for a few weeks in London, and she owns that Meg’s unhappy.”

“And they’re seeing each other in London now?” Oldmeadow was deeply discomposed.

“No. He’s away just now. And Meg is going to meet the bridal party in Paris at the end of July. Nancy feels that when Meg gets back under Adrienne’s influence there’ll be nothing to fear.”

“We depend on her, then, so much, already,” he murmured. He was reviewing, hastily, his last impressions of Meg and they were not reassuring. The only thing that was reassuring was to reflect on his impressions of Adrienne. “Grandma’s parlour” returned to him with its assurance of deep security. Above everything else Adrienne was respectable.

“Yes. That’s just it,” Mrs. Averil agreed. “We depend on her. And I feel we’re going to depend more and more. She’s the sort of person who mends things. So we mustn’t think of what she spoils.”

What Adrienne Toner had spoiled was, however, to be made very plain next morning both to Nancy’s old friend and to her mother. Beside her plate at breakfast was a letter addressed in Barney’s evident hand, a letter in a narrow envelope stamped with the name of a French hotel and showing, over the address, an engraving of peaks against the sky. Nancy met the occasion with perfect readiness, saying as she looked at the letter, waiting to open it till she had made the tea—Nancy always made the tea in the morning while her mother sat behind the bacon and eggs at the other end of the table—“How nice; from Barney. Now we shall have news of them.”

Nothing less like an Ariane could be imagined than Nancy as she stood there in her pink dress above the pink, white and gold tea-cups. One might have supposed from her demeanour that a letter from Barney was but a happy incident in a happy day. But, when she dropped into her chair and read, it was evident that she was not prepared for what she found. She read steadily, in silence, while Oldmeadow cut bread at the sideboard and Mrs. Averil distributed her viands, and, when the last page was reached, they both could not fail to see that Nancy was blushing, blushing so deeply that, as she thus felt herself betray her emotion, tears came thickly into her downcast eyes.

“I’ll have my tea now, dear,” said Mrs. Averil. “Will you wait a little longer, Roger?” She tided Nancy over.

But Nancy was soon afloat. “The letter is for us all,” she said. “Do read it aloud, Roger, while I have my breakfast.”

Barney’s letters, in the past, had, probably, always been shared and Nancy was evidently determined that her own discomposure was not to introduce a new precedent. Oldmeadow took up the sheets and read.

“Dearest Nancy,—How I wish you were with us up here. It’s the most fantastically lovely place. One feels as if one could sail off into it. I dug up some roots of saxifrage for your wall yesterday, such pretty pink stuff. It’s gone off in a box wrapped in damp moss and I hope will reach you safely. A horrid, vandal thing to do; but for you and Aunt Monica I felt it justified, and there are such masses of it. I saw a snow-bunting yesterday, much higher up than the saxifrage; such a jolly, composed little fellow on a field of snow. The birds would drive you absolutely mad, except that you’re such a sensible young person you’d no doubt keep your head even when you saw a pair of golden eagles, as we did, floating over a ravine. I walked around the Lac d’Annecy this morning, before breakfast, and did wish you were with me. I thought of our bird-walks at dawn last summer. There were two or three darling warblers singing, kinds we haven’t got at home; and black redstarts and a peregrine falcon high in the air. I could write all day if I’d the time, about the birds and flowers. You remember Adrienne telling us that afternoon when she first came to Coldbrooks about the flowers. But I mustn’t go on now. We’re stopping for tea in a little valley among the mountains with flowers thick all around us and I’ve only time to give our news to you and Aunt Monica and to send our love. Mother is extremely fit and jolly, though rather scared at the hairpin curves; Adrienne has to hold her hand. I’m too happy for words and feel as if I’d grown wings. How is Chummie’s foot? Did the liniment help? Those traps are beastly things. I feel just as you do about the rabbits. Adrienne reads aloud to us in the evenings; a man called Claudel; awfully stiff French to follow but rather beautiful. I think you’d like him. Not a bit like Racine! Best love to you and Aunt Monica. Here’s Adrienne, who wants to have her say.”

Had it been written in compunction for *Ariane aux bords laissée*? or, rather, in a happy reversion to sheer spontaneity, a turning, without any self-consciousness, to the comrade of the bird-walks who would, after all, best feel with him about snow-buntings and redstarts? Oldmeadow paused for the surmise, not looking up, before he went on from Barney’s neat, firm script to his wife’s large, clear clumsy hand.

“Dearest Nancy,” ran the postscript, and it had been at the postscript, Oldmeadow now could gauge, that Nancy had first found herself unprepared. “I, too, am thinking of you, with Barney. It is a great joy to feel that where, he says, I’ve given him golden eagles and snow-buntings he’s given me—among so many other dear, wonderful people—a Nancy. I get the best of the bargain, don’t I? I can’t see much of the birds for looking at the peaks—*my* peaks, so familiar yet, always, so new again. ‘Stern daughters of the voice of God’ that they are. Radiantly white against a cloudless sky we find them to-day. Barney’s profile is beautiful against them—but his nose is badly sun-burned! *All* our noses are sun-burned! That’s what one pays for flying among the Alps.

“Mother Nell—we’ve decided that that’s what I’m to call her—looks ten years younger all the same, as I knew she would. We talk of you all so often—of you and Meg and Palgrave and Barbara, and half a dozen times a day Barney wishes that one or the other of you were with us to see this or that. It’s specially you for the birds I notice. You must take me for some bird-walks at dawn some day and teach me to know all your lovely English songsters....

Dear little Cousin-Sister, I send you my love with his and, with him, hold you warmly in my heart. Will 'Aunt Monica' accept my affectionate and admiring homages?

"Yours ever
"ADRIENNE"

Oldmeadow had not expected that she could write such a human letter; yet it explained Nancy's blush. Barney's spontaneous affection she could have faced, but she had not been able to face his wife's determined tenderness. Adrienne had meant it well, no doubt—Oldmeadow gazed on after he had finished, but she had no business to mean so well, no business to thrust herself, in this community of intimacy, into what was Barney's place alone. There was more in it, he knew, with Meg and Mrs. Averil to help him, than the quite successful playfulness. She was to be more intimate than Barney, that was what it came to; more, much more tender if Barney was to be allowed intimacy and tenderness. That was really what she intended Nancy to see, and that Barney had no place at all where she, Adrienne, did not also belong.

"Very sweet; very sweet and pretty," Mrs. Averil's voice broke in, and he realized that he had allowed himself to drop into a grim and tactless reverie; "I didn't know she had such a sense of humour. Sun-burned noses and 'Stern daughters of the voice of God.' Well done. I didn't think Adrienne would ever look as low as noses. They must be having a delightful tour. I know black redstarts. There was one that used to wake me every morning at four, one summer, in Normandy, with the most foolish, creaking song; just outside my window. Give Barney my love when you write and return my niece's affectionate and admiring homages. Mother Nell. I shouldn't care to be called Mother Nell somehow."

So Mrs. Averil's vexation expressed itself and so she floated Nancy along. But Nancy, long since, had pulled herself together and was able to look at Oldmeadow, while her lashes closed together in her own smile, and to say that she'd almost be willing to lose her nose for the sake of hearing the new warblers. Mrs. Averil opened her "Times" and over marmalade Nancy and Oldmeadow planned the trip that they would take some day, when their ship came in, the three of them, a bird-trip to the French Alps.

CHAPTER XII

OLDMEADOW sat beside Adrienne Chadwick and knew that from the other end of the room, where he talked to Mrs. Aldesey, Barney's eyes were on them, though he tried to keep them off. It was the first dinner-party the young couple had given since they had come up to town, for though they were established at Coldbrooks in the communal family life Adrienne seemed to find to her taste, and though Barney had at once immersed himself in country pursuits, they had taken and furnished this large house in Connaught Square and it was, apparently, settled that the winter months were to be spent in London. How that was to be combined with farming at Coldbrooks, or whether Barney intended to take a header into politics and felt a London house, big enough for entertaining, part of the programme, Oldmeadow hadn't an idea, and for the rather sinister reason that he had hardly laid his eyes on Barney since his return from his wedding-journey. Even though asked to tea once or twice, while, established in an hotel, they were finding and furnishing the house, he had never found them alone and either Barney had made no opportunity, or his wife had seen to it that none should be made, for having a *tête-à-tête* with his old friend.

Oldmeadow could not associate Barney with ambitions, either social or political, nor, he was bound to say, as he looked round the dinner-table, where Adrienne sat at one end with Lord Lumley and Barney at the other with Lady Lumley, could one infer from its disparate and irrelevant elements any such ambitions in Adrienne. He had taken Mrs. Aldesey down and had felt her at moments to be almost too resourceful, her air of graceful skill in keeping the ball rolling seeming too much to emphasize its tendency to drop. Without Mrs. Aldesey, without Meg—vividly engaged at one corner with a fair young American—without himself, for he had aided and abetted Lydia to the best of his ability, the dinner would have been a dull one and he was not sure that even their enterprise had redeemed it. Adrienne had not any air of fearing dullness or of being in need of assistance. Oldmeadow saw that the blue ribbon was frequently unrolled and that, as always, it made a silence in which it could be watched. Lord Lumley, his handsome, official head bent in an attitude of chivalrous devotion, watched earnestly, and the fair young American paused in the midst of whatever he might be saying to Meg to take almost reverent note; but Oldmeadow fancied more than once that he caught startled eyes fixed upon it, especially when there emerged a lustrous loop of quotation:—

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,—"

The silence for that had been so general that even Barney, far away, and protected by Mrs. Aldesey, was aware of it.

"How wonderfully he *wears*, doesn't he, dear old Browning," said Mrs. Aldesey, and in the glance that Barney cast upon her was an oddly mingled gratitude and worry. The fair young American, he was very fair and had clear, charming eyes, finished the verse in a low voice to Meg and Meg looked at him affectionately the while. He was evidently one of Adrienne's appurtenances.

It was a dull dinner. Pretty, festive Mrs. Pope and young Mr. Haviland, reputed to be a wit and one of Meg's young men as Mrs. Pope was one of Barney's young women, would not with any eagerness again attend a board where the hostess quoted Browning and didn't know better than to send you down, the first with a stern young socialist who sat silent for the most part and frowned when addressed, and the second with a jocular, middle-aged lady from California, the mother, Oldmeadow gathered, of the clear-eyed youth, from whose ample bosom Mr. Haviland's subtle arrows glanced aside leaving him helplessly exposed to the stout bludgeonings of her humour. Adrienne paused once or twice in her conversation to smile approval upon her compatriot and to draw Lord Lumley's attention to her special brand of merriment, good Lord Lumley adjusting his glasses obediently to take it in.

And now they were all assembled in the drawing-room. Like everything about Adrienne, it was simple and rather splendid. Barney had wisely kept his modernities for his own study and it was a pity, Oldmeadow reflected, that Adrienne had not kept for her own boudoir the large portrait of herself that hung over the mantelpiece, since it was a note more irrelevant than any Post Impressionist could have been and cast a shade of surmise over the taste displayed in the Chippendale furniture and the Chinese screens.

"Rather sweet, isn't it; pastoral and girlish, you know," Barney had suggested tentatively as Mrs. Aldesey had placed herself before it. "Done in Paris a good many years ago; the man was very much the fashion then. Adrienne was only sixteen. It's an extraordinarily perfect likeness still, isn't it?"

To which Mrs. Aldesey, all old lace and exquisite evasion, had murmured, her lorgnette uplifted: "Quite dear and ingenuous. Such a relief after your arid Cubists. What would they make of Mrs. Barney *en bergère*, I'd like to know? A jumble of packing-cases with something twisted in a corner to signify a bleat."

For the picture, painted with glib assurance and abounding in pink and azure, portrayed Adrienne dressed as a shepherdess and carrying a flower-wreathed crook.

Adrienne, to-night at all events, was looking very unlike the shepherdess, but that might be because of the approaches of her maternity. Mrs. Chadwick, when he had last been at Coldbrooks, had told him that the baby was expected in May and that Adrienne was wonderful about it, dedicating herself to its perfection in thought and deed with every conscious hour.

"If only I'd thought about my babies before they came like that, who knows what they might have turned out!" she had surmised. "But I was very silly, I'm afraid, and the only thing I really did think of was how I should dress them. I've always loved butcher's-blue linen for children and I must say that mine did look very nice in it. For everyday, you know."

Oldmeadow found it extremely difficult to think of Adrienne as a mother; it was much easier to think of her as a shepherdess. Such solidities of experience gave her even a certain pathos in his eyes, though he was in no whit dislodged from his hostility to her. She was as mild, as satisfied, apparently, with herself and with existence, as ever, yet her eyes and lips expressed fatigue and a purely physical sadness that was uncharacteristic, and it was uncharacteristic that she should be rather thickly powdered.

They had not really met since the morning of her adjuration to him at Coldbrooks and he wondered if she remembered that little scene as vividly as he did. She would be very magnanimous did she not remember it unpleasantly; and he could imagine her as very magnanimous; yet from the fact that she had kept Barney from him he could not believe that she was feeling magnanimously.

She watched Barney and Mrs. Aldesey now, as they stood before her portrait, and he fancied that the sadness in her eyes, whatever might be its cause, deepened a little. When she turned them on him it was with an effect of being patiently ready for him. Perhaps, really, she had been more patient than pleased all evening.

"So you are settled here for the winter?" he said. "Have you and Barney any plans? I've hardly seen anything of him of late."

"We have been so very, very busy, you know," said Adrienne, as if quite accepting his right to an explanation.

She was dressed in pale blue and wore, with her pearl necklace, a little wreath of pearls in her hair. In her hands she turned, as they talked, a small eighteenth-century fan painted in pink and grey and blue, and he was aware, as he had been at Coldbrooks, of those slow and rather fumbling movements.

"We couldn't well ask friends," she went on, "even the dearest, to come and sit on rolls of carpet with us while we drank our tea, could we? We've kept our squalor for the family circle. Meg's been with us; so dear and helpful; but only Meg and a flying visit once or twice from Mother Nell. Nancy couldn't come. But nothing, it seems, will tear Nancy from hunting. I feel that strange and rather sad; the absorption of a fine young life in such primitiveness."

"Oh, well; it's not her only interest, you know," said Oldmeadow, very determined not to allow himself vexation. "Nancy is a creature of such deep country roots. Not the kind that grow in London."

"I know," said Adrienne. "And it is just those roots that I want to prevent my Barney's growing. Roots like that tie people to routine; convention; acceptance. I want Barney to find a wider, freer life. I hope he will go into politics. If we have left Coldbrooks and the dear people there for these winter months it's because I feel he will be better able to form opinions here than in the country. I saw quite well, there, that people didn't form opinions; only accepted traditions. I want Barney to be free of tradition and to form opinions for himself. He has none now," she smiled.

She had been clear before, and secure; but he felt now the added weight of her matronly authority. He felt, too, that, while ready for him and, perhaps, benevolently disposed, she was far more indifferent to his impressions than she had been at Coldbrooks. She had possessed Barney before; but how much more deeply she possessed him now and how much more definitely she saw what she intended to do with him.

"You must equip him with your opinions," said Oldmeadow, and his voice was a good match for hers in benevolence. "I know that you have so many well-formed ones."

"Oh, no; never that," said Adrienne. "That's how country vegetables are grown; first in frames and then in plots; all guided and controlled. He must find his own opinions; quite for himself; quite freely of influence. That is the rock upon which Democracy is founded. Nothing is more arresting to development than living by other people's opinions."

"But we must get our opinions from somebody and somewhere. The danger of democracy is that we don't grow them at all; merely catch them, like influenza, from a mob. Not that I disbelieve in democracy."

"Don't you, Mr. Oldmeadow?" She turned her little fan and smiled on him. "You believe in liberty, equality, fraternity? That surprises me."

"Democracy isn't incompatible with recognizing that other people are wiser than oneself and letting them guide us; quite the contrary. Why surprised? Have I seemed so autocratic?"

"It would surprise me very much to learn that you believed in equality, to start with that alone"; Adrienne smiled on.

"Well, I own that I don't believe in people who have no capacity for opinions being impowered to act as if they had. That's the fallacy that's playing the mischief with us, all over the world."

"They never will have opinions worth having unless they are given the liberty to look for them. You don't believe in liberty, either, when you say that."

“No; not for everybody. Some of our brothers are too young and others too stupid to be trusted with it.”

“They’ll take it for themselves if you don’t trust them with it,” said Adrienne, and he was again aware that though she might be absurd she, at all events, was not stupid. “All that we can do in life is to trust, and help, and open doors. Only experience teaches. People must follow their own lights.”

He moved forward another pawn, and though he did not find her stupid he was not taking her seriously. “Most people have no lights to follow. It’s a choice for them between following other people’s or resenting and trampling on them. That, again, is what we can see happening all over the world.”

“So it is, you must own, just as I thought; you don’t even believe in fraternity,” said Adrienne, and she continued to smile her weary, tranquil smile upon him; “for we cannot feel towards men as towards brothers, and trust them, unless we believe that the light shines into each human soul.”

He saw now that unless they went much deeper, deeper than he could be willing, ever, to go with Adrienne Toner, he must submit to letting himself appear as worsted. He knew where he believed the roots of trust to grow and he did not intend, no never, to say to Adrienne Toner that only through the love of God could one at once distrust and love the species to which one belonged. He could have shuddered at the thought of what she would certainly have found to say about God.

“You’ve got all sorts of brothers here to-night, haven’t you,” he remarked, putting aside the abstract theme and adjusting his glass. “Some of them look as though they didn’t recognize the relationship. Where did you find our young socialist over there in the corner? He looks very menacing. Most of the socialists I’ve known have been the mildest of men.”

“He is a friend of Palgrave’s. Palgrave brought him to see me. Oh, I’m so glad—Gertrude is going to take care of him. She always sees at once if anyone looks lonely. That’s all right, then.”

Oldmeadow was not so sure it was as he observed the eye with which Mr. Besley measured the beaming advance of the lady from California.

“I wonder if you would like my dear old friend, Mrs. Prentiss,” Adrienne continued, watching her method with Mr. Besley. “The Laughing Philosopher, Mother used to call her. She is a very rare, strong soul. That is her son, talking to Lady Lumley. He’s been studying architecture in Paris for the past three years. A radiant person. Mrs. Prentiss runs a settlement in San Francisco and has a brilliant literary and artistic salon. She is a real force in the life of our country.”

“Why should you question my appreciation of rarity and strength? I can see that she is very kind and that if anybody can melt Mr. Besley she will.”

“Gertrude would have melted Diogenes,” said Adrienne with a fond assurance that, though it took the form of playfulness, lacked its substance. “I hope they will find each other, for he is rare and strong, too. What he needs is warmth and happiness. He makes me think of Shelley when he talks.”

“He’s too well up in statistics to make me think of Shelley,” Oldmeadow commented. Barney, he saw, from his place beside Mrs. Aldesey at the other end of the room, was still watching them, pleased now, it was evident, by the appearance of friendly, drifting converse they presented. “He’s not altogether unknown to me for we often, in our review, get our windows broken by his stones; well-thrown, too. He’s very able. So you thought it might do the British Empire good to face him? Well, I suppose it may.”

“Which are the British Empire?” asked Adrienne. “You. To begin with.”

“Oh, no. Count me out. I’m only a snappy, snuffy scribbler. Good old Lord Lumley, of course, with all his vast, well-governed provinces shimmering in the Indian sun behind him. And Sir Archibald, who talks so loudly in the House. Palgrave didn’t bring him, I’ll be bound.”

“No. Lady Lumley brought him. He and Lord Lumley are certainly more than odds and ends.” She had an air of making no attempt to meet his badinage, if it was that, but of mildly walking past it. “They are, both of them, rather splendid people, in spite of their limitations. They’ve accepted tradition, you see, instead of growing opinion. That is their only trouble. I was afraid you were going to say Mr. Haviland. He is certainly an odd and end.”

Mr. Haviland and Mrs. Pope had found each other and were indulging in mirthful repartee in the back drawing-room. “I feel safe with Lord Lumley and Sir Archibald,” Adrienne added.

“I’d certainly rather trust myself in their hands than in Mr. Besley’s. I’d almost rather trust myself in the hands of Mr. Haviland.”

“You mean that they would, at least, keep you comfortable and that Mr. Besley wouldn’t.” She, too, had her forms of repartee.

“I expect it’s just what I do mean,” he assented. “If Mr. Besley and his friends had their way, I for instance, and workers of my type, would soon, I suspect, have to forego our tobacco and our chamber-music. We’re only marketable in a comfortable world. And there are more comfortable people, I maintain, under Lord Lumley, than there would be under Mr. Besley.”

“‘Heartily know, when half-gods go, the gods arrive,’” said Adrienne. “All revolutions must begin by burning away the evil and the refuse. Not that I am a revolutionist, or even a socialist.”

“You can’t separate good from evil by burning,” he said. “You burn them both. That’s what the French did in their lamentable bonfire, for which they’ve been paying in poorer brains and poorer blood ever since. We don’t want revolutions. All we want is slow, good-tempered reform. Revolutions are always ill-tempered, aren’t they, and nothing worth doing was ever done in an ill-temper. You are making me very didactic.”

“Oh, but I prefer that so much to persiflage,” said Adrienne, with her tranquillity. “And I am glad to hear what you really believe. But it is sad to me that you should see no ardour or glory in anything. With all its excesses and errors, I have always felt the French Revolution to be a sublime expression of the human spirit.”

“It might have been; if they could only have kept their heads—metaphorically as well as literally. But the glory and ardour were too mixed with hatred and ignorance. I’m afraid I do tend to distrust those states of feeling. They tend so easily to self-deception.”

She was looking at him, quietly and attentively, and he was, for the first time since their initial meeting, perhaps, feeling quite benevolently towards her; quite as the British Empire might feel towards a subject race. It was, therefore, the more difficult to feel anything but exasperation when she said, having, evidently, summed up her

impressions and found her verdict: “Yes. You distrust them. We always come back to that, don’t we? You distrust yourself, too. So that, when you tell me what you believe, you can only do it in the form of making fun of my beliefs. I feel about you, Mr. Oldmeadow, what I felt that morning when I tried to come near you and you wouldn’t let me. I feel it more the more I see you; and it makes me sad. It isn’t only that you distrust ardour and glory, all the sunlight and splendour of life; but you are afraid of them; afraid to open your heart to trust. You shut your door upon the sunlight and take up your caustic pen; and you don’t see how the shadows fall about you.”

It was indeed a dusty tumble from the quite civilized pavement of their interchange, and it was unfortunate that upon his moment of discomfiture, when he saw himself as trying to clap the dust off his knees and shoulders in time to be presentable, Barney and Mrs. Aldesey should have chosen to approach them. Barney, no doubt, imagined it a propitious moment in which to display to Mrs. Aldesey his wife’s and his friend’s amity.

Adrienne was perfectly composed. She had borne her testimony and, again, done her best for him, pointing out to him that the first step towards enfranchisement was to open his door to the sunlight that she could so bountifully supply. She turned a clear, competent eye upon her husband and his companion.

“Well, dear, and what have you and Roger been so deep in?” Barney inquired, looking down at her with a fondness in which, all the same, Oldmeadow detected the anxiety that had hovered in his eye all evening. “You’ve seemed frightfully deep.”

“We have been,” said Adrienne, looking up at him. “In liberty, equality and fraternity; all the things I believe in and that Mr. Oldmeadow doesn’t. I can’t imagine how he gets on at all, he believes in so few things. It must be such a sad, dim, groping world to live in when there are no stars above to look at and no hands below to hold.”

“Oh, well, you see,” said Mrs. Aldesey with her dragging smile, “his ancestors didn’t sign the Declaration of Independence.”

“We don’t need ancestors to do that,” Adrienne smiled back. “All of us sign it for ourselves—all of us who have accepted our birthright and taken the gifts that our great, modern, deep-hearted world hold out to us. You are an American, Mrs. Aldesey, so you find it easy to believe in freedom, don’t you?”

“Very easy; for myself; but not for other people,” Mrs. Aldesey replied and Oldmeadow saw at once, with an added discomfort, that she underestimated, because of Adrienne’s absurdity, Adrienne’s intelligence. “But then the very name of any abstraction—freedom, humanity, what you will—has always made me feel, at once, dreadfully sleepy. It’s not ever having had my mind trained, Mrs. Barney. Now yours was, beautifully, I can see.”

Adrienne looked up at her, for Mrs. Aldesey, her lace about her shoulders, her lorgnette in her hands, had not seated herself, and it was further evident to Oldmeadow that she weighed Mrs. Aldesey more correctly than Mrs. Aldesey weighed her. “Very carefully, if not beautifully,” she said. “Have I made you sleepy already? But I don’t want to go on talking about abstractions. I want to talk about Mr. Oldmeadow. The truth is, Barney,” and her voice, as she again turned her eyes on her husband, had again the form but not the substance of gaiety, “the truth is that he’s a lonely, lonely bachelor and that we ought to arrange a marriage for him, you and I. Since he doesn’t believe in freedom, he won’t mind having a marriage arranged, will he?—if we can find a rare, sweet, gifted girl.”

Barney had become red. “Roger’s been teasing you, darling. Nobody believes in freedom more. Don’t let him take you in. He’s an awful old humbug with his Socratic method. He upsets you before you know where you are. He’s always been like that.”

“Yes; hasn’t he,” Mrs. Aldesey murmured.

“But he hasn’t upset me at all,” said Adrienne. “I grant that he was trying to, that he was doing his very best to give me a tumble; but I quite see through him and he doesn’t conceal himself from me in the very least. He doesn’t really believe in freedom, however much he may have taken *you* in, Barney; he’d think it wholesome, of course, that you should believe in it. That’s his idea, you see; to give people what he thinks wholesome; to choose for them. It’s the lack of faith all through. But the reason is that he’s lonely; dreadfully lonely, and because of that he’s grown to be, as he says, snappy and snuffy; so that we must borrow a page from his book and find what is wholesome for him. I know all the symptoms so well. I’ve had friends just like that. It’s a starved heart and having nobody to be fonder of than anyone else; no one near at all. He must be happily married as soon as possible. A happy marriage is the best gift of life, isn’t it, Mrs. Aldesey? If we haven’t known that we haven’t known our best selves, have we?”

“It may be; we mayn’t have,” said Mrs. Aldesey, cheerfully; but she was not liking it. “I can’t say. Am I to have a hand in choosing his bride? I know his tastes, I think. We’re quite old friends, you see.”

“No one who doesn’t believe in freedom for other people may help to choose her,” said Adrienne, with a curious blitheness. “That’s why he mayn’t choose her himself. We must go quite away to find her; away from ceilings and conventions and out into the sunlight. I don’t believe happiness is found under ceilings. And it’s what we all need more than anything else. Even tobacco and chamber-music don’t make you a bit happy, do they, Mr. Oldmeadow? and if one isn’t happy one can’t know anything about anything. Not really.”

“Alas!” sighed Mrs. Aldesey, keeping up her end, but not very successfully, while Barney fixed his eyes upon his wife. “And I thought I’d found it this evening, under this ceiling. Well, I shall cherish my illusion, since you tell me it’s only that, and thank you for it, Mrs. Barney. The Lumleys are going to give me a lift and I see that their car has been announced.”

“Stay on a bit, Roger,” Barney murmured, as the Lumleys approached. “I’ve seen nothing of you for ages.”

Adrienne rose to greet her parting guests.

“Darling Adrienne, good-night. It’s been perfectly delightful, your little party,” said Lady Lumley, who was large, light and easily pleased; an English equivalent of the lady from California, but without the sprightliness. “Your dear young Mr. Prentiss is a treasure. He’s been telling me about Sicilian temples. We *must* get there one day. Mrs. Prentiss says they will come to us for a week-end before they go. How extraordinarily interesting she is. Don’t forget that you are coming on the fifteenth.”

“I shall get up a headache, first thing!” Lord Lumley stated in a loud, jocular whisper, reverting to a favourite jest on Adrienne’s powers. “That’s the thing to go in for, eh? I won’t let Charlie cut me out this time. Not a night’s sleep till you come!”

“Go in for as many as you like, dear Lord Lumley,” said Adrienne, smiling her assurance of being able to deal with a series.

“Good-night, Mrs. Barney,” said Mrs. Aldesey. “Leave me a little standing-room under the stars, won’t you.”

“There’s always standing-room under the stars,” said Adrienne. “We don’t exclude each other there.”

The party showed no other signs of breaking up. The Laughing Philosopher had melted, or, at all events, mastered Mr. Besley, and talked to him with, now and again, a maternal hand laid on his knee. Mr. Haviland and Mrs. Pope still laughed in the back drawing-room, Meg and Mr. Prentiss had come together again and Sir Archibald was engaged with a pretty girl. After looking around upon them all, Adrienne, with the appearance of a deeper fatigue, sank back upon her sofa.

“You know, darling,” Barney smiled candidly upon his wife, “you rather put your foot in it just now. Mrs. Aldesey’s marriage isn’t happy. I ought to have warned you.”

“How do you mean not happy, Barney?” Adrienne looked up at him. “Isn’t Mr. Aldesey dead?”

“Not at all dead. She left him some years ago, didn’t she, Roger? He lives in New York. It’s altogether a failure.”

Adrienne looked down at her fan. “I didn’t know. But one can’t avoid speaking of success sometimes, even to failures.”

“Of course not. Another time you will know.”

Adrienne seemed to meditate, but without compunction. “That was what she meant, then, by saying she believed in freedom for herself but not for other people.”

“Meant? How do you mean? She was joking.”

“If she left him. It was she who left him?”

“I don’t know anything about it,” Barney spoke now with definite vexation and Oldmeadow, in his corner of the sofa, his arms folded, his eyes on the cornice, gave him no help. “Except that, yes, certainly; it’s she who left him. She’s not a deserted wife. Anything but.”

“It’s only Mr. Aldesey who is the deserted husband,” Adrienne turned her fan and kept her eyes on it. “It’s only he who can’t be free. Forgive me if she’s a special friend of yours, Mr. Oldmeadow; but it explains. I felt something so brittle, so unreal in her, charming and gracious as she is. It is so very wrong for a woman to do that, I think.”

“Wrong?” Barney echoed, staring at Oldmeadow while this firm hand was laid upon his Egeria. “What the dickens do you mean, darling? She is a special friend of Roger’s. You don’t surely mean to say a woman must, under all circumstances, stick to a man she doesn’t love?”

“Anything but that, Barney. I think that she should leave him and set him free. It’s quite plain to me that if a wife will not live with her husband it is her duty to divorce him. Then, at any rate, he can try for happiness again.”

“Divorce him, my dear child!” Barney was trying to keep up appearances but the note of marital severity came through and as it sounded Adrienne raised her eyes to his: “It’s not so easy as all that! Aldesey, whatever his faults, may have given her no cause to divorce him, and I take it you’ll not suggest that Mrs. Aldesey should give him cause to divorce her.”

On her sofa, more pallid under her powder, more sunken than before, and with the queer squashed-in look emphasized, Adrienne kept steady eyes uplifted to her husband. “Not at all, dear Barney,” she returned and Oldmeadow, though hardened against the pathos of her physical disability, saw that she spoke with difficulty, “but I think that you confuse the real with the conventional wrong. Mrs. Aldesey would not care to face any unconventionality; that is quite apparent. She would draw her skirts aside from any conventional wrong-doing. But the real wrong she would be blind to; the wrong of keeping anyone bound in the emptiness you have made for them. Setting free is not so strange and terrible a matter as you seem to imagine. It’s quite easy for brave, unshackled people.”

“Well, I must really be off,” Oldmeadow now seized the occasion to declare. “I believe, as a matter of fact, that Mr. Aldesey lives very contentedly in New York, collecting French prints and giving excellent dinners. Anything open and scandalous would be as distasteful to him as to his wife. They are, both of them, happier apart; that’s all it comes to. So you must read your lessons, even by proxy, to more authentic misdemeanants, Mrs. Barney. All right, Barney. Don’t come down. I’ll hope to see you both again quite soon.”

So he got away, concealing as best he might, his sense of tingling anger. But it died away to a sense of chill as he walked down Park Lane. Was not Barney unhappy, already? What did she say to him when she got him to herself? He felt sure that she had never bargained for a husband who could look at her with ill-temper.

CHAPTER XIII

“Roger, see here, I’ve only come to say one word—about the absurd little-matter of last night. Only one; and then we’ll never speak of it again,” said poor Barney.

He had come as soon as the very next day—to exonerate, not to apologize; that was evident at once. Oldmeadow had not long to wait before learning what she had said to him when she got him to herself, nor long to wait before realizing that if Barney had been unhappy last night he thought himself happy to-day.

“Really, my dear boy,” he said, “it’s not worth talking about.”

“Oh, but we must talk about it,” said Barney. He was red and spoke quickly. “It upset her frightfully; it made her perfectly miserable. She cried for hours, Roger,” Barney’s voice dropped to a haggard note. “You know, though she bears up so marvellously, she’s ill. She doesn’t admit illness and that makes it harder for her, because it simply bewilders her when she finds herself on edge like this and her body refusing to obey her. The baby is coming in May, you know.”

“I know, my dear Barney. The evening was very fatiguing for her. I saw it all I think. I noticed from the beginning how tired she looked.”

“Horribly tired. Horribly fatiguing. I’m glad you saw it. For that’s really what I came to explain. She was tired to begin with and Mrs. Aldesey put her on edge. I think I saw that myself at dinner—and, oh, before that; on the day we

had tea with her, when we first came up, in November—Adrienne felt then that Mrs. Aldesey didn't understand or care for her. You know she is so full of love and sympathy for everybody herself that she is literally sickened when she is treated in that artificial, worldly way. And you know, Roger, Mrs. Aldesey *is* artificial and worldly."

That was how she had put it to Barney, of course. But Oldmeadow saw further than Mrs. Aldesey and her artificiality. He saw a dishevelled and weeping Adrienne stricken to the heart by the sense of threatened foundations, aghast by what she had seen in her husband's eyes; and he was aware, even while he resented having it put upon Lydia, of a curious, reluctant pity for the pale, weeping figure. Lydia had, obviously, displeased her; but Lydia had been the mere occasion; she could have dealt easily enough with Lydia. It had been the revelation that Barney could oppose her, could almost, for a moment, dislike her, that had set her universe rocking. Her first taste of reality, then. The thought came rather grimly, with the pity. After all it was their best chance of happiness; that she should learn to accept herself as a person who could be opposed, even disliked, in flashes, while still loved. He had sat silent while he thought, one of his silences which, when he emerged from them, he often recognized as over-long. Barney must have felt the weight of all he did not say when all that he found to say was: "What it comes to, doesn't it, is that they neither of them take much to each other. Lydia is certainly conventional."

"Ah, but Lady Lumley is conventional, too," said Barney with an irrepressible air of checkmate. "Hordes of conventional people adore Adrienne. It's a question of the heart. There are people who are conventional without being worldly. It's worldliness that stifles Adrienne. It's what she was saying last night: 'They have only ceilings; I must have the sky.' Not that she thinks *you* worldly, dear old boy."

"I hope you try to interpret me to her kindly," said Oldmeadow, smiling. Even at the moment when Barney, all innocently, was revealing to him Adrienne's tactics, the fragments of her vocabulary imbedded in his speech were affording him amusement. "You must try and persuade her that I've quite a fondness for the sky myself, and even published a volume of verse in my youth."

"I do. Of course I do," said Barney eagerly. "And I gave her your poems, long ago. She loved them. It's your sardonic pessimism she doesn't understand—in anyone who could have written like that when they were young. She never met anything like it before in her life. And the way you never seem to take anything seriously. It makes her dreadfully sorry for you, even while she finds it so hard to accept in anyone she cares for—because she really does so care for you, Roger"—there was a note of appeal in Barney's voice—"and does so long to find a way out for you. It was a joke, of course; but all the same we've often wished you could find the right woman to marry."

Barney, as he had done last night, grew very red again, so that it was apparent to Oldmeadow that not only the marriage but the woman—the rare, gifted girl—had been discussed between him and his wife.

"Adrienne thinks everyone ought to be married, you see," he tried to pass it off. "Since we are so happy ourselves."

"I see," said Oldmeadow. "There's another thing you must try to persuade her of: that I'm not at all *un jeune homme à marier*, and that if I ever seek a companion it will probably be some one like myself, some one sardonic and pessimistic. If I fixed my affections on the lovely girl, you see, it isn't likely they'd be reciprocated."

"Oh, but"—Barney's eagerness again out-stepped his discretion—"wouldn't the question of money count there, Roger? If she had plenty of money, you know, or you had; enough for both; and a place in the country? Of course, it's all fairy-tale; but Adrienne is a fairy-tale person; material things don't count with her at all. She waves them away and wants other people to wave them away, too. What she always says is: 'What does my money *mean* unless it's to open doors for people I love?' She's starting that young Besley, you know, just because of Palgrave; setting him up as editor of a little review—rotten it is, I think—but Adrienne says people must follow their own lights. And it's just that; she'd love to open doors for you, if it could make you happy."

Oldmeadow at this, after a moment of receptivity, began to laugh softly; but the humour of the situation grew upon him until he at last threw back his head and indulged in open and prolonged mirth. Barney watched him bashfully. "You're not angry, I see," he ventured. "You don't think it most awful cheek, I mean?"

"I think it is most awful cheek; but I'm not angry; not a bit," said Oldmeadow. "Fairy-godmothers are nothing if not cheeky; are they? Oh, I know you meant your, not her, cheek. But it's the fault of the fairy-godmother, all the same, and you must convince her that I'm not in love with anybody, and that if ever I am she'll have to content herself with my small earnings and a flat in Chelsea."

So he jested; but, when his friend was gone, he realized that he was a little angry all the same and he feared that his mirth had not been able to conceal from Barney that what he really found it was confounded impudence. Barney's face had worn, as he departed, the look of mingled gratitude and worry and Barney must feel, as well as he felt, that their interview hadn't really cleared up anything—except his own readiness to overlook the absurdities of Barney's wife. What became more and more clear to himself was that unless he could enable Adrienne to enroll his name on her banner she would part him from Barney and that her very benevolence was a method. The more he thought of it the more uncomfortable he felt, and his inner restlessness became at length an impulse urging him out to take counsel or, rather, seek solace, with the friend from whom Adrienne could never part him. He would go and have tea with Lydia Aldesey and with the more eagerness from the fact that he was aware of a slight dissatisfaction in regard to Lydia. She had not altogether pleased him last night. She had put herself in the wrong; she had blundered; she hadn't behaved with the skill and tact requisite; and to elicit from her a confession of ineptitude would make his sense of solace the more secure.

The day was a very different day from the one in April when he had first gone to ask Mrs. Aldesey for information about people called Toner. It was early February, dull and cold and damp. No rain was falling, but the trees were thick with moisture and Oldmeadow had his hands deep in his pockets and the collar of his coat turned up about his ears. As he crossed the Serpentine, an electric brougham passed him, going slowly, and he had a glimpse within it, short but very vivid, of Adrienne, Meg, and Captain Hayward.

Adrienne, wearing a small arrangement of black velvet that came down over her brows, was holding Meg's hand and, while she spoke, was looking steadily at her, her face as white as that of a Pierrot. Meg listened, gloomily it seemed, and Captain Hayward's handsome countenance, turned for refuge towards the window, showed an extreme embarrassment.

They passed and Oldmeadow pursued his way, filled with a disagreeable astonishment though, absurdly, his mind was at first occupied only in an attempt to recover a submerged memory that Captain Hayward's demeanour

suggested. It came at last in an emancipating flash and he saw again, after how many years, the golden-brown head of his rather silly setter, John, turned aside in shy yet dignified repudiation, that still, by a dim, sick smile, attempted to conceal distress and to enter into the spirit of the game—as a kitten was held up for his contemplation. A kitten was a very inadequate analogy, no doubt, for the theme of Adrienne's discourse; yet Captain Hayward's reaction to a situation for which he found himself entirely unprepared was markedly like John's. And he, like John, had known that the game was meant to be at his expense. John and Captain Hayward got Oldmeadow out of the park before he had taken full possession of his astonishment and could ask himself why, if Adrienne were engaged in rescuing Meg from her illicit attachment, she should do it in the company of the young man. Yet, strangely enough, he felt, as he walked, a growing sense of reassurance. For an emergency like this, after all, given amenable subjects, Adrienne was the right person. He hadn't dreamed it to be such an emergency; but since it was, Adrienne would pull them through. As she would have laid her hand on the head of Bacchus and reformed him, so she would lay it on the head of Captain Hayward.

CHAPTER XIV

THE incident put Mrs. Aldesey quite out of his mind, and it was not till he stood on her doorstep and rang her bell that he remembered his grievance against her and realized that it had been made more definite by this glimpse of Adrienne's significance. That his friend was prepared for him was evident at his first glance; she had even, he saw, been expecting him, for she broke out at once with: "Oh, my dear Roger—what *are* you going to do with her?"

He was actually pleased to find himself putting her, with some grimness, in her place. "What is she going to do with us? you mean. You underrate Mrs. Barney's capacity, let me tell you, my dear friend."

But Mrs. Aldesey was not easily quelled. "Underrate her! Not I! She's a Juggernaut if ever there was one. Her capacity is immense. She'll roll on and she'll crush flat. That poor Barney! She is as blind as a Juggernaut, but *he* will come to see—alas! he is seeing already—though you and I danced round him with veils and cymbals—that people won't stand being pelted with platitudes from soup to dessert. The Lumleys will, of course; it's their natural diet; though even they like their platitudes served with a touch of *sauce piquante*; but Rosamund Pope told me that she felt black and blue all over and Cuthbert Haviland—malicious toad—imitates her already to perfection: dreadful little voice, dreadful little smile, dreadful little quotations and all. It will be one of his London gags. That shepherdess! My dear Roger, don't pretend to me that *you* don't see it!"

Oldmeadow, sunken in the chair opposite her, surveyed her over his clasped hands with an air of discouragement.

"What I'm most seeing at the moment is that she's made you angry," he remarked. "If what you say were all the truth, why should she make you angry? She's not as blind as a Juggernaut. That's where you made your mistake. She'll only crush the people who don't lie down before her. She knows perfectly well where she is going—and over whom. So be careful, that is my advice, and keep out of her way; unless you want to lose a toe or a finger."

Mrs. Aldesey showed, at this, that he had arrested her. In spite of the element of truth in Adrienne's verdict upon her he knew her to be, when veils and cymbals were cast aside, a sincere and gallant creature. She did not attempt to hide from him now and, after a moment of mutual contemplation, she laughed a little, with not unreal mirth and said: "I suppose I am angry. I suppose I'm even spiteful. It's her patronage, you know. Her suffocating superiority. To have to stand there, for his sake, and *take* it! You overrate her, Roger. No woman not abysmally stupid could say the things she says."

"Your mistake again. She's able to say them because she's never met irony or criticism. She's not stupid," he found his old verdict. "Only absurd. You know, you gave yourself away to her. You showed her what you thought of her. You patronized *her*."

"Is *no* retaliation permitted?" Mrs. Aldesey moaned. "Must one accept it all? Be scourged with the stars and Browning and then bow one's head to her caresses? After all, Barney is your friend, not mine, and it's as your friend that I've tried to be decent to his wife. But she hates me like poison. She gave herself away, too, you know. I liked the way she excluded me from her prospects for your welfare. And of course she knew my marriage wasn't a happy one."

"I don't think that she did. No; I don't think so. You *are* poison to her—cold poison," said Oldmeadow. "Don't imagine for a moment she didn't see that you were dancing about him with veils and cymbals. She didn't give herself away, for she had nothing to conceal. She was candid and you weren't. She didn't pretend that you were under the stars with her; while you kept up appearances."

"But what's to become of your Barney if we don't keep them up!" Mrs. Aldesey cried. "Is he to be allowed to see that nobody can stand her—except people he can't stand? He'll have to live, then, with Mrs. and Mr. Prentiss. Did you try to talk to Mrs. Prentiss? Do you know that she told me that death was 'perfectly sublime'?"

"Perhaps it is. Perhaps she'll find it so. They all seem to think well of death, out in California"—Oldmeadow allowed himself to relax from his admonitory severity. "Mrs. Prentiss isn't as silly as she seems, I expect. And you exaggerate Barney's sensitiveness. He'd get on very well with Mrs. Prentiss if you weren't there to show him you found her a bore. He has a very simple side and we must hope it may become simpler. The only chance for Barney, I see it more and more, is that we should efface ourselves as much as possible. The people who find the Prentisses a bore, I mean. And it won't be difficult for us to do that. She will see to it that we are effaced. Only, of course, it's a grief. I'm so fond of him"; and as Oldmeadow stretched forth his legs and put his hands in his pockets there drifted across his mind, in a thin, sharp, knife-like stroke, the memory of Barney—tall eighteen-year-old Barney—with dear old Effie, luxuriously upturned in his arms, being softly scratched—Barney's hand with a cat was that of an expert—and told that she was the best and most beautiful of cats.

"It's a great shame," said Mrs. Aldesey; "I've been thinking my spiteful thoughts, too, instead of sympathizing with you. Of course, if it's any consolation to you, one usually does lose one's friends when they marry. But it needn't have been as bad as this. What a thousand pities he couldn't have fallen in love with a nice girl of his own kind. You

couldn't do anything about it when you went down in the spring?"

Oldmeadow had never said anything to Mrs. Aldesey about his hopes for Nancy. He had a secretive instinct for keeping his friendships in compartments and discussed only those portions that overflowed. "Nothing," he said. "And the mischief was that I went down hostile, as you warned me against doing. Barney saw at once that I didn't care for her; and she saw it at once. He even forced a sort of expression of opinion from me and I know now that it's always glooming there at the back of his mind when he sees me. It was quite useless. Once he'd fallen under her spell it was all up with him. She has her singular power and, for a man in love with her, her singular charm. Even I, you know, understand that."

Mrs. Aldesey contemplated him. "I confess I can't," she said. "She is so desperately usual. I've seen her everywhere, ever since I can remember. Attending lectures at the Sorbonne; listening to Wagner at Bayreuth; having dresses tried on at Worth's; sitting in the halls of a hundred European hotels. She is the most unescapable form of the American woman; only not *du peuple* because of the money and opportunity that has also extirpated everything racy, provincial and individual."

"I don't know," said Oldmeadow. He mused, his hands clasped behind his head. "She's given me all sorts of new insights." His eyes, after his wont, were on the cornice and his friend's contemplation, relaxed a little from its alert responsiveness, allowed itself a certain conjectural softness as she watched him. "I feel," he went on, "since knowing her, that I understand America, her America, better than you do. You're engaged in avoiding rather than in understanding it, aren't you? What you underrate, what Americans of your type don't see—because, as you say, it's so oppressively usual—is the power of her type. If it is a type; if she is as ordinary as you say. It's something bred into them by the American assumption of the fundamental rightness of life; a confidence unknown before in the history of the world. An individual, not an institutional or social, confidence. They do, actually, seem to take their stand on the very universe itself. Whereas the rest of us have always had churches or classes to uphold us. They have all the absurdities and crudities of mere individualism. They have all the illusions of their ignorance. Yet I sometimes imagine, after I've seen her, that it's a power we haven't in the least taken into our reckoning. Isn't it the only racial thing that America has produced—the only thing that makes them a race? It makes them independent of us, when we've always imagined, in our complacency, that they were dependent. It enables them to take what we have to give, but to do with it what they, not we, think best. And by Jove, who knows how far it will carry them! Not you, my dear Lydia. You'll stay where you are—with us."

His eyes had come back and down to her, and her gaze resumed its alertness and showed him that she found the picture he drew disquieting. "You mean it's a new kind of civilization that will menace ours?"

"It's not a civilization; that's just what it's not. It's a state of mind. Perhaps it will menace us. Perhaps it does. We've underrated it; of that I'm sure; and underrated power is always dangerous. It will be faith without experience against experience without faith. What we must try for, if we're not to be worsted, is to have both—to keep experience and to keep faith, too. Only so shall we be able to hold our own against Mrs. Barney. And even so we shan't be able to prevent her doing things to us—and for us. She'll do things for us that we can't do for ourselves." His mind reverted to the faces of the brougham. "In that way she's bound to worst us. We'll have to accept things from her."

Oldmeadow's eyes had gone back to the cornice and, in the silence that followed, Mrs. Aldesey, as she sat with folded arms, played absently with the lace ruffle at her wrist. The lace was an heirloom, like her rings, and the contemplation of them may have afforded her some sustainment. "She's made you feel all that, then," she remarked. "With her crook and her hat and her rose-wreathed lamb. If such a sardonic old lion as you does really grow bodeful before the rose-wreathed lamb there is, I own, reason to fear for the future. I'm glad I'm growing old. It would hurt me to see her cutting your claws."

"Oh, she won't hurt us!" Oldmeadow smiled at her. "It's rather we who will hurt her—by refusing to lie down with her lamb. If that's any comfort to you."

"Not in the least. I'm not being malicious. You don't call it hurt, then, to be effaced?"

"Smothered in rose-leaves, eh?" he suggested. "It would be suffocating rather than suffering. She does give me that feeling. But you'll make her suffer—you have, you know—rather than she you."

"I really don't know about that," said Mrs. Aldesey. "You make me quite uncomfortable, Roger. You make me superstitious. She's done that to me already. I refuse to take her seriously, but I shall avoid her. That's what it comes to. Like not giving the new moon a chance to look at you over your left shoulder."

CHAPTER XV

On a morning in early March Oldmeadow found, among the letters waiting for him on his breakfast-table, one from Nancy. Nancy and he, with all their fondness, seldom wrote to each other and he was aware, on seeing her writing, of the presage of something disagreeable that the unexpected often brings.

"Dear Roger," he read, and in his first glance he saw his presage fulfilled. "We are in great trouble. Aunt Eleanor has asked me to write because she is too ill and it is to me as well as to her that Meg has written and she wants you to see Barney at once. Here are Meg's letters. She has gone away with Captain Hayward. Aunt Eleanor and Mother think that Barney may be able to persuade Adrienne to bring her back. No one else, we feel convinced, will have any influence with her. Do anything, anything you can, dear Roger. Mother and I are almost frightened for Aunt Eleanor. She walks about wringing her hands and crying, and she goes up to Meg's room and opens the door and looks in—as if she could not believe she would not find her there. It is heart-breaking to see her. We depend on you, dear Roger.

"Yours ever
"Nancy."

"Good Lord!" Oldmeadow muttered while, in lightning flashes, there passed across his mind the face of John the setter and a Pierrot's face, white under a low line of black velvet. He took up Meg's letters, written from a Paris hotel.

"DARLING MOTHER, I know it will make you frightfully miserable and I can't forgive myself for that; but it had to be. Eric and I cared too much and it wasn't life at all, going on as we were apart. Try, darling Mother, to see it as we do see things nowadays. Adrienne will explain it all—and you must believe her. You know what a saint she is and she has been with us in it all, understanding everything and helping us to be straight. Everything will come right. Iris Hayward will set Eric free, of course; she doesn't care one bit for him and has made him frightfully unhappy ever since they married, and she wants to marry some one else herself—only of course she'd never be brave enough to do it this way. When Eric is free, we will marry at once and come home, and, you will see, there are so many sensible people nowadays; we shall not have a bad time at all. Everything will come right, I'm sure; and even if it didn't, in that conventional way—I could not give him up. No one will ever love me as he does.

"Your devoted child
"MEG."

That was the first: the second ran:

"DEAREST NANCY,—I know you'll think it frightfully wrong; you are such an old-fashioned little dear and you told me often enough that I oughtn't to see so much of Eric. Only of course that couldn't have prepared you for this and I expect Aunt Monica won't let you come and stay with us for ages. Never mind; when you marry, you'll see, I'm sure. Love is the *only* thing, really. But I should hate to feel I'd lost you and I'm sure I haven't. I want to ask you, Nancy dear, to do all you can to make Mother *take* it. I feel, just because you will think it so wrong, that you may be more good to her than Adrienne—who doesn't think it wrong at all—at least not in Mother's way. It would be frightfully unfair if Mother blamed Adrienne. She did all she could to show us where we stood and to make us play the game, and it would be pretty hard luck if people were to be down on her now because we *have* played it. We might have been really rotters if it hadn't been for Adrienne; cheats and hypocrites, I mean; stealing our happiness. I know Adrienne can bring Barney round. It's only Mother who troubles me, just because she is such a child that it's almost impossible to make her see reason. She doesn't recognize right and wrong unless they're in the boxes she's accustomed to. Everything is in a box for poor, darling old Mummy. But I mustn't go on. Be the dear old pal you always have and help me out as well as you can.

"Your loving
"MEG."

"Good Lord," Oldmeadow muttered once more. He pushed back his chair and rose from the table in the bright spring sunlight. He had the feeling, almost paternal, of disgrace and a public stripping. He saw Eleanor Chadwick stopping at Meg's door to look in at the forsaken room, distraught in her grief and incomprehension. He saw Nancy's pale, troubled face and Monica Averil's, pinched and dry in its sober dismay. And then again, lighted by a flare at once tawdry and menacing, the face of Adrienne Toner, the intruder, the insufferable meddler and destroyer, a Pierrot among fire-works that had, at last, set fire to the house. He found a taxi on the Embankment and drove to Connaught Square. Freshly decorated with window-boxes, the pleasant, spacious house had a specially smiling air of welcome, but the butler's demeanour told him that something of the calamity had already penetrated. Adrienne, if she had not heard before, would have had her letters; Barney, who had been kept in the dark, would have been enlightened, and the irrepressible exclamations that must have passed between them seemed dimly reflected on the man's formal countenance. Mrs. Chadwick, he told Oldmeadow, was breakfasting upstairs with Mr. Chadwick, and he ushered him into Barney's study.

Oldmeadow waited for some time among the Post Impressionist pictures, one of which remained for ever afterwards vividly fixed in his memory of the moment; a chaotic yet determined picture; featureless yet, as it were, conveying through its unrecognizable elements the meaning of a grin. And, as he stood in the centre of the room and looked away from the derisive canvas, he saw on Barney's desk photographs of Adrienne, three photographs of her; one as a child, a sickly looking but beaming child; one in early girlhood, singularly childlike still; and one in her bridal dress of only the other day, it seemed, mild and radiant in her unbecoming veil and wreath.

It was Barney who came to him. Poor Barney. He was more piteously boyish than ever before to his friend's eye; so beautifully arrayed, all in readiness for a happy London day with his angel, so pale, so haggard and perplexed. "Look here, Roger," were his first words, "do you mind coming upstairs to Adrienne's room? She's not dressed yet; not very well, you know. You've heard, then, too?"

"I've just heard from Nancy. Why upstairs? I'd rather not. We'd better talk this over alone, Barney. All the more if your wife isn't well."

"Yes; yes; I know. I told her it would be better. But she insists."

The effect of a general misery Barney gave was heightened now by his unhappy flush. "She doesn't want us to talk it over without her, you see. She comes into it all too much. From Nancy, did you say? What's Nancy got to do with this odious affair?"

"Only what Meg has put upon her—to interpret her as kindly as she can to your mother. Here are the letters. I'd really rather not go upstairs."

"I know you'll hold Adrienne responsible—partly at least. She expects that. She knows that I do, too; she's quite prepared. I only heard half an hour ago and of course it knocked me up frightfully. Meg! My little sister! Why she's hardly more than a child!"

"I'm afraid she's a good deal more than a child. I'm afraid we can't hold Meg to be not responsible, though, obviously, she'd never have taken such a step unaided and unabetted. Just read these letters, Barney; it won't take a moment to decide what's best to be done. I'll go down to your mother and you must be off, at once, to Paris, and see if you can fetch Meg back."

But after Barney, with a hesitating hand and an uncertain glance, had taken the letters and begun to read them, the door was opened with decorous deliberation and Adrienne's French maid appeared, the tall, sallow, capable-

looking woman whom Oldmeadow remembered having seen at Coldbrooks a year ago.

"Madame requests that *ces Messieurs* should come up at once; she awaits them," Joséphine announced in unemphatic but curiously potent accents. Adrienne's potency, indeed, was of a sort that flowed through all her agents and Oldmeadow thought that he detected, in the melancholy gaze bent upon Barney, reprobation for his failure to attain the standard set for him by a devotion wholehearted and reverential. Mrs. Chadwick, he remembered, had said that Adrienne's maid adored her.

"Yes, yes. We're coming at once, Joséphine," said Barney. Reading the letters as he went, he moved to the door and Oldmeadow found himself, perforce, following.

He had not yet visited the morning-room and even before his eyes rested on Adrienne they saw, hanging above her head where she sat on a little sofa, a full-length portrait of Mrs. Toner; in white, standing against a stone balustrade and holding lilies; seagulls above her and a background of blue sea.

Adrienne was also in white, but she wore over her long, loose dress a little jacket of pink silk edged with swan's down and the lace cap falling about her neck was rosetted with pink ribbon. It was curious to see her in this almost frivolous array, recalling the shepherdess, when her face expressed, for the first time in his experience of her, an anger and an agitation all the more apparent for its control. She was pale yet flushed, odd streaks of colour running up from her throat and dying in the pallor of her cheeks. Her condition had evidently much affected her complexion and her nose, through its layer of powder, showed a pinched and reddened tint. It made Oldmeadow uncomfortable to look at her; her mask of calm was held at such a cost; she was at once so determinedly herself and so helplessly altered; and it was not with an automatic courtesy only that he went up to her and held out his hand. An impulse of irrelevant yet irrepressible pity stirred him.

She had fixed her eyes on him as he entered, but now looking at her husband and not moving, she said: "I do not think you want to take my hand, Mr. Oldmeadow. You will think me a criminal too, as Barney does."

"Darling! Don't talk such nonsense!" Barney cried. "I haven't blamed you, not by a word. I know you've done what you think right. Look, darling; Roger has had these letters. Just read them. You see what Meg writes—there—to Nancy—about your having done all you could to keep them straight. You haven't been fair to yourself in talking to me just now."

Adrienne, without speaking, took the letters and Oldmeadow moved away to the window and stood looking down at the little garden at the back of the house where a tall almond-tree delicately and vividly bloomed against the pale spring sky. He heard behind him the flicker of the fire in the grate, the pacing of Barney's footsteps as he walked up and down, and the even turning of the pages in Adrienne's hands. Then he heard her say: "Meg contradicts nothing that I have said to you, Barney. She writes bravely and truly; as I knew that she would write."

Barney stopped in his pacing. "But darling; what she says about straightness?" It was feeble of Barney and he must know it. Feeble of him even to think that Adrienne might wish to avail herself of the loophole or that she considered herself in any need of a shield.

"You can't misunderstand so much as that, Barney," she said. "Meg and I mean but one thing by straightness; and that is truth. That was the way I tried to help them; it is the only way in which I can ever help people. I showed them the truth and kept it before their eyes when they were in danger of forgetting it. I said to them that if they were to be worthy of their love they must be brave enough to make sacrifices for it. I did not hide from them that there would be sacrifices—if that is what you mean."

"It's not what I mean, darling! Of course it's not!" broke from poor Barney almost in a wail. "Didn't you try at all to dissuade them? Didn't you show them that it was desperate, and ruinous, and wrong? Didn't you tell Meg that it would break Mother's heart!"

The blue ribbon was again unrolled and Oldmeadow, listening with rising exasperation, heard that the sound of her own solemn cadences sustained her. "I don't think anything in life is desperate or ruinous or wrong, Barney, except turning away from one's own light. Meg met a reality and was brave enough to face it. I regret, deeply, that it came to her tragically, not happily; but happiness can grow from tragedy if we are brave and true and Meg is brave and true in her love. It won't break your mother's heart. Hers is a small, but not such a feeble, heart as that. I believe that the experience may strengthen and ennoble her. She has led too sheltered a life."

Oldmeadow at this turned from the window and met Barney's miserable eyes. "There's really no reason for my staying on, Barney," he said, and his voice as well as his look excluded Adrienne from their interchange. "I'll take the 1.45 to Coldbrooks. What shall I tell your mother? That you've gone to Paris this morning?"

"Yes, that I've gone to Paris. That I'll do my best, you know. That I hope to bring Meg back. Tell her to keep up her courage. It'll only be a day or two after all, and we may be able to hush it up."

"Stop, Mr. Oldmeadow," said Adrienne in a grave, commanding tone. It was impossible before it to march out of the room and shut the door, though that was what his forcibly arrested attitude showed that he wished to do. "You as well as Barney must hear my protest," said Adrienne, and she fixed her sombre eyes upon him. "Meg is with the man she loves. In the eyes of heaven he is her husband. It would be real as contrasted with conventional disgrace were she to leave him now. She will not leave him. I know her better than you do. I ask you"—her gaze now turned on Barney—"I desire you, not to go to her on such an unworthy errand."

"But, Adrienne," Barney, flushed and hesitating, pleaded, "it's for Mother's sake. Mother's too old to be enlarged like that—that's really nonsense, you know, darling. You see what Nancy says. They are frightened about her. It's not only convention. It's a terrible mistake Meg's made and she may be feeling it now and only too glad to have the way made easy for her to come back. I promise you to be as gentle as possible. I won't reproach her in any way. I'll tell her that we're all only waiting to forgive her and take her back."

"Forgive her, Barney? For what? It is only in the eyes of the world that she has done wrong and I have lifted her above that fear. Convention does not weigh for a moment with me beside the realities of the human heart; nor would it with you, Barney, if it were not for the influence of Mr. Oldmeadow. I have warned you before; it is easy to be worldly-wise and cynical and to keep to the broad road; it is easy to be safe. But withering lies that way: withering and imprisonment, and—"

"Come, come, Mrs. Barney," Oldmeadow interposed, addressing her for the first time and acidly laughing. "Really we haven't time for sermons. You oughtn't to have obliged me to come up if you wanted to influence Barney all by yourself. He sees quite clearly for himself the rights and the wrongs of this affair, as it happens. If I were to

preach for a moment in my turn I might ask you how it was that you didn't see that it was your duty to tell Meg's mother and brother how things were going and let them judge. You're not as wise as you imagine—far from it. Some things you can't judge at all. Meg and Hayward aren't people of enough importance to have a right to break laws; that's all that it comes to; there's nothing to be gained by their breaking laws; not only for other people, but for themselves. They're neither of them capable of being happy in the ambiguous sort of life they'd have to lead. There's a reality you didn't see at all in your haste to flout convention. Barney could have dealt with Hayward, and Meg could have been packed off to the country and kept there till she'd learned to think a little more about other people's hearts and a little less about her own. What business had you, after all, to have secrets from your husband and to plot with the two young fools behind his back? Isn't Meg his sister rather than yours?" His bitterness betrayed him and conscious hostility rose in him, answering the menace that measured him in her eyes. "What business had you, a new-comer among us, to think yourself capable of managing all their lives and to set yourself up above them all in wisdom? You take too much upon yourself"; his lips found the old phrase: "Really you do. It's been your mistake from the beginning."

He could not have believed that a face so framed for gentleness could show itself at once so calm and so convulsed. He knew that something had happened to her that had never happened to her before in her life. She kept her eyes steadily on him and he wondered if she were not reciting some incantation, some exorcism, derived from the seagulled lady above her: Power in Repose—Power in Love—Power in Light. Her mouth and eyes and nostrils were dark on her pallor and he felt that she held back all the natural currents of her being in order to face and quell him with the supernatural.

"Never mind all that, Roger," Barney was sickly murmuring. "I don't feel like that. I know Adrienne didn't for a moment mean to deceive me."

"We will mind it, Barney," said Adrienne, breathing with difficulty. "I had, Mr. Oldmeadow, the business, first, of loyalty to another human soul who, in the crisis of its destiny, confided in me. I have been nearer Meg than any of you have guessed, from my first meeting with her. You were all blind. I saw at once that she was tossed and tormented. I am nearer, far nearer her, than her brother and mother. In them she would never have dreamed of confiding and she came to me because she felt that in me she would find reality and in them mere formulas. I do not look upon women as chattels to be handed about by their male relatives and locked up if they do not love according to rule and precedent. I look upon them as the equals of men in every respect, as free as men to shape their lives and to direct their destinies. You speak a mediæval language, Mr. Oldmeadow. The world, our great, modern, deep-hearted world, has outstripped you."

"Darling," Barney forestalled, breathlessly, as she paused, any reply that Oldmeadow might have been tempted to make, "don't mind if Roger speaks harshly. He's like that and no one cares for us more. He doesn't mean conventionality at all, or anything mediæval. You don't understand him. He puts his finger on the spot about Meg and Hayward. It's exactly as he says; they're not of enough importance to have a right to break laws. If you could have confided in me, it would have been better; you must own that. We'd have given Meg a chance to pull herself together. We'd have sent Hayward about his business. It's a question, as Roger says, of your wisdom; of your knowledge of the world. You didn't understand them. They're neither of them idealists like you. They can't be happy doing what you might be big enough to do. Just because they're not big. Try to take it in, darling. And we really needn't go on talking about it any longer, need we? It isn't a question of influence. All we have to decide on is what's to be done. Roger must go to Mother and tell her I'm starting this morning to try and fetch Meg back. Imagine Mother with a divorce case on! It would kill her, simply. That's all. Isn't it, Roger?"

"Stop, Mr. Oldmeadow," said Adrienne, again. She rose as she spoke. As he saw her stand before them, her approaching maternity dominated for a moment all his impressions of her. Veiled and masked adroitly as it was, its very uncouthness curiously became her. Her head, for once, looked small. Like an archaic statue, straight and short and thick, her altered form had dignity and amplitude and her face, heavy with its menace, hard with its control, might have been that of some austere and threatening priestess of fruitfulness.

"Barney, wait," she said. Her arms hung straight beside her, but she slightly lifted a hand as she spoke and Oldmeadow noted that it was tightly clenched. "It is I, not your friend, whom you must question as to what it is right that you should do. I do not consent to his reading of my unwisdom and unworthiness. I ask you not to consent to it. I ask you again not to go. I ask you again to respect my judgment rather than his."

"Darling," the unfortunate husband supplicated; "it's not because it's Roger's judgment. You know it's what I felt right myself—from the moment you told me what had happened. You say people must follow their own light. It *is* my light. I must do what Mother asks and try to bring Meg back."

"It is not your light, Barney. It is craft and caution and fear. More than that, do you not see, must I make plain to you what it is you do to me in going? You insult me. You treat what I have believed right for Meg to do as a crime from which she must be rescued. You drag me in the dust with her. Understand me, Barney"—the streaks of colour deepened on her neck, her breath came thickly—"if you go, you drag me in the dust."

"How can it drag you in the dust, Mrs. Barney, if Meg wants to come back?" Oldmeadow interposed in the tone of a caustic doctor addressing a malingering patient. "We're not talking of crimes; only of follies. Come; be reasonable. Don't make it so painful for Barney to do what's his plain duty. You're not a child. You have, I hope, courage enough and humour enough to own that you can make mistakes—like other people."

"Yes, yes, Adrienne, that's just it," broke painfully from Barney, and, as he seized the clue thus presented to him, Adrienne turned her head slowly, with an ominous stillness, and again rested her eyes upon him. "It's childish, you know, darling. It's not like you. And of course I understand why; and Roger does. You're not yourself; you're over-strained and off-balance and I'm so frightfully sorry all this has fallen upon you at such a time. I don't want to oppose you in anything, darling—do try to believe me. Only you must give me the credit for my own convictions. I do feel I must go. I do feel Roger must take that message to Mother. After all, darling," and now in no need of helping clues he found his own and the irrepressible note of grief vibrated in his voice, "you do owe me something, don't you? You do owe us all something—to make up, I mean. Because, without you, Meg would never have behaved like this and disgraced us all. Oh—I don't mean to reproach you!"

"Good-bye then, I'm off," said Oldmeadow. "I'm very sorry you made me come up. Good-bye, Mrs. Barney." She had not spoken, nor moved, nor turned her eyes from Barney's face.

"Good-bye. Thanks so much, Roger." Barney followed him, with a quickness to match his own, to the door. But

Adrienne, this time, did not call him back. She remained standing stock-still in front of her sofa.

"Tell Mother I'm off," said Barney, grasping his hand. "Tell her she'll hear at once, as soon as I know anything. Thanks so awfully," he repeated. "You've been a great help."

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that Barney should say that, Oldmeadow reflected as he sped down the stairs. "But she's met reality at last," he muttered, wondering how she and Barney faced each other above and hearing again the words that must echo so strangely in her ears: "Disgraced us all." And, mingled with his grim satisfaction, was, again, the sense of irrelevant and reluctant pity.

CHAPTER XVI

It was Saturday and he had to wire to Mrs. Aldesey that he could not go with her next day to the Queen's Hall concert they had planned to hear together.

Nancy was waiting for him at the station in her own little pony-cart and as he got in she said: "Is Barney gone?"

"Yes; he'll have gone by now," said Oldmeadow and, as he said it, he felt a sudden sense of relief and clarity. The essential thing, he saw it as he answered Nancy's question, was that he should be able to say that Barney had gone. And he knew that if he hadn't been there to back him up, he wouldn't have gone. So that was all right, wasn't it?

As he had sped past the sun-swept country the reluctant pity had struggled in him, striving, unsuccessfully, to free itself from the implications of that horrid word: "Disgraced." It was Adrienne who had disgraced them; that was what Barney's phrase had really meant, though he hadn't intended it to mean it. She, the stranger, the new-comer, had disgraced them. And it was true. Yet he wished Barney hadn't stumbled on the phrase—just because she was a stranger and a new-comer. And Barney would never have found it had he not been there. But now came the sense of relief. If he hadn't been there, Barney wouldn't have gone.

"Aunt Eleanor is longing to see you," said Nancy. "Her one hope, you know, is that he may bring Meg back." Nancy's eyes had a strained look, as though she had lain awake all night.

"You think she may come back?"

He felt, himself, unable to form any conjectures as to what Meg was likely to do. What she had done was so strangely unlike her.

"Not if it means leaving Captain Hayward for good," said Nancy. "But Aunt Eleanor and Mother both think that she may be willing to come till they can marry."

"That's better than nothing, isn't it," said Oldmeadow, and Nancy then surprised him by saying, as she looked round at him: "I don't want her to come back."

"Don't want her to come back? But you wanted Barney to go?"

"Yes. He had to go. Just so that everything might be done. So that it might be put before her. And to satisfy Aunt Eleanor. But, don't you see, Roger, it would really make it far more difficult for Aunt Eleanor to have her here. What would she do with her?—since she won't give up Captain Hayward? She can love Meg and grieve and yearn over her now. But if she were here she couldn't. It would be all grief and bitterness."

Nancy had evidently been thinking to some purpose during her sleepless night and he owned that her conclusion was the sound one. What disconcerted him was her assurance that Meg would not leave her lover. After Adrienne, Nancy was likely to have the most authentic impressions of Meg's attitude; and, as they drove towards Chelford, he was further disconcerted by hearing her murmur, half to herself: "It would be silly to leave him now, wouldn't it."

"Not if she's sorry and frightened at what she's done," he protested. "After all the man's got a wife who may be glad to have him back."

But Nancy said: "I don't think she would. I think she'll be glad not to have him back. Meg may be frightened; but I don't believe she'll be sorry; yet."

He meditated, somewhat gloomily, as they drove, on the unexpectedness of the younger generation. He had never thought of Nancy as belonging, in any but the chronological sense, to that category; yet here she was, accepting, if not condoning, the rebellion against law and morality.

Mrs. Averil had driven down to the Little House where she was to be picked up and, as they turned the corner to the Green, they saw her waiting at the gate, her furs turned up around her ears, her neat little face pinched and dry, as he had known that he would find it, and showing a secure if controlled indignation, rather than Nancy's sad perplexity.

"Well, Roger, you find us in a pleasant predicament," she observed as Oldmeadow settled the rug around her knees. "Somehow one never thinks of things like this happening in one's own family. Village girls misbehave and people in the next county run away sometimes with other people's wives; but one never expects such adventures to come walking in to one's own breakfast-table."

"Disagreeable things do have a way of happening at breakfast-time, don't they," Oldmeadow assented. The comfort of Mrs. Averil was that even on her death-bed she would treat her own funeral lightly: "I wonder it remains such a comfortable meal, all the same."

"I suppose you've had lunch on the train," said Mrs. Averil. "Will you believe it? Poor Eleanor was worrying about that this morning. She's got some coffee and sandwiches waiting for you, in case you haven't. I'm so thankful you've come. It will help her. Poor dear. She's begun to think of all the other things now. Of what people will say and how they will hear. Lady Cockerell is very much on her mind. You know what a meddlesome gossip she is, and only the other day Eleanor snubbed her when she was criticizing Barbara's new school. The thought of her is disturbing her dreadfully now."

"I suppose these leech-bites do help to alleviate the pain of the real wound," said Oldmeadow.

"Not in the least. They envenom it," Mrs. Averil replied. "I'd like to strangle Lady Cockerell myself before the

news reaches her."

Nancy drove on, her eyes fixed on the pony's ears. "I don't believe people will talk nearly as much as you and Aunt Eleanor imagine," she now remarked. "I've told her so; and so must you, Mother."

"You are admirable with her, Nancy. Far better than I am. I sit grimly swallowing my curses, or wringing my hands. Neither wringing nor cursing is much good, I suppose."

"Not a bit of good. It's better she should think of what people say than of Meg; but when it comes to agonizing over them I believe the truth is that people nowadays *do* get over it; far more than they used to; especially if Aunt Eleanor can show them that *she* gets over it."

"But she can't get over it, my dear child!" said Mrs. Averil, gazing at her daughter in a certain alarm. "How can one get over disgrace like that or lift one's head again—unless one is an Adrienne Toner! Oh, when I think of that woman and of what she's done! For she is responsible for it all! Every bit of it. Meg was a good girl, at heart; always. In spite of that silly liquid powder. And so I tell Eleanor. Adrienne is responsible for it all."

"I don't, Mother; that's not my line at all," said Nancy. "I tell her that what Meg says is true." Nancy touched the pony with the whip. "If it hadn't been for Adrienne she might have done much worse."

"Really, my dear!" Mrs. Averil murmured.

"Come, Nancy," Oldmeadow protested; "that was a retrospective threat of Meg's. Without Adrienne she'd never have considered such an adventure—or its worse alternative. Encourage your aunt to curse Adrienne. Your Mother's instinct is sound there."

But Nancy shook her head. "I don't know, Roger," she said. "Perhaps Meg would have considered the alternative. Girls do consider all sorts of things nowadays that Mother and Aunt Eleanor, in their girlhood, would have thought simply wicked. They *are* wicked; but not simply. That's the difference between now and then. And don't you think that it's better for Meg and Captain Hayward to go away so that they can be married than to be, as she says, really rotters; than to be, as she says, cheats and hypocrites and steal their happiness?"

"My dear child!" Mrs. Averil again murmured, while Oldmeadow, finding it, after all, a comfort to have a grown-up Nancy to discuss it with, said, "My contention is that, left to herself, Meg would have thought them both wicked."

"Perhaps," Nancy said again; "but even old-fashioned girls did things they knew to be wicked sometimes. The difference Adrienne has made is that Meg doesn't think herself wicked at all. She thinks herself rather noble. And that's what I mean about Aunt Eleanor. It will comfort her if she can feel a little as Adrienne feels—that Meg isn't one bit the worse, morally, for what she's done."

"Are you trying to persuade us that Meg isn't guilty, my dear?" Mrs. Averil inquired dryly. "Are you trying to persuade us that Adrienne has done us all a service? You surely can't deny that she's behaved atrociously, and first and foremost, to Barney. Barney could have known nothing about it, and can you conceive a woman keeping such a thing from her husband?"

But Nancy was feeling the pressure of her own realizations and was not to be scolded out of them. "If Meg is guilty, and doesn't know it, she will suffer dreadfully when she finds out, won't she? It all depends on whether she has deceived herself or not, doesn't it? I'm not justifying her or Adrienne, Mother; only trying to see the truth about them. How could Adrienne tell Barney when it was Meg's secret? We may feel it wrong; but she thought she was justified." The colour rose in Nancy's cheek as she named Barney, but she kept her tired eyes on her mother and added, "I don't believe it was easy for her to keep it from him."

"My dear, anything is easy for her that flatters her self-importance!" cried Mrs. Averil impatiently. "I'll own, if you like, that she's more fool than knave—as Meg may be; though Meg never struck me as a fool. Things haven't changed so much since my young days as all that; it's mainly a matter of names. If girls who behave like Meg find it pleasanter to be called fools than knaves, they are welcome to the alternative. Noble they never were nor will be, whatever the fashion."

Oldmeadow did not want the sandwiches, so, as soon as they reached Coldbrooks, he was led upstairs to Mrs. Chadwick's room. He found his poor friend lying on the sofa, the blinds drawn down and a wet handkerchief on her forehead. She burst out crying as he entered. Oldmeadow sat down beside her and took her hand and, as he listened to her sobs, felt that he need not trouble to pity Adrienne.

"What I cannot, cannot understand, Roger," she was at last able to say, and he realized that it was of Adrienne, not Meg, that she was speaking, "is how she can bear to treat us so. We all loved and trusted her. You know how I loved her, Roger. I felt Meg as safe in her hands as in my own. Oh, that wicked, wicked man! I hardly know him by sight. That makes it all so much more dreadful. All I do know is that his wife is a daughter of poor Evelyn Madderley, who broke her back out hunting."

"I don't believe there's much harm in him, you know," Oldmeadow suggested. "And I believe that he is sincerely devoted to Meg."

"Harm, Roger!" poor Mrs. Chadwick wailed, "when he is a married man and Meg only a girl! Oh, if there is harm in anything there is in that! Running away with a girl and ruining her life! Barney will make him feel what he has done. Barney *has* gone?"

"Yes, he's gone, and I am sure we can rely on him to speak his mind to Hayward."

"And don't you think he may bring Meg back, Roger? Nancy says I must not set my mind on it; but don't you think she may be repenting already? My poor little Meg! She was hot-tempered and could speak very crossly if she was thwarted; but I think of her incessantly as she was when she was a tiny child. Self-willed; but so sweet and coaxing in her ways, with beautiful golden hair and those dark eyes. I always thought of Meg, with her beauty, as sure to marry happily; near us, I hoped"—Mrs. Chadwick began to sob again. "And now!—Will he find them in Paris? Will they not have moved on?"

"In any case he'll be able to follow them up. I don't imagine they'll think of hiding."

"No; I'm afraid they won't. That is the worst of it! They won't hide and every one will come to know and then what good will there be in her coming back! If only I'd had her presented last year, Roger! She can never go to court now," Mrs. Chadwick wept, none the less piteously for her triviality. "To think that Francis's daughter cannot go to court! She would have looked so beautiful, with my pearls and the feathers. The feathers are becoming to so few girls. Nancy could not wear them nearly so well. Nancy can go and my daughter can't!"

“I don’t think the lack of feathers will weigh seriously upon Meg’s future, my dear friend.”

“Oh, but it’s what they stand for, Roger, that will weigh!” Mrs. Chadwick, even in her grief, retained her shrewdness. “It’s easy to laugh at the feathers, but you might really as well laugh at wedding-rings! To think that Francis’s daughter is travelling about with a man and without a wedding-ring! Or do you suppose they’ll have thought of it and bought one? It would be a lie, of course; but don’t you think that a lie would be justifiable under the circumstances?”

“I don’t think it really makes any difference, until they can come home and be married.”

“I suppose she must marry him now—if they won’t hide—and will be proud of what they’ve done; she seems quite proud of it!—everyone will hear, so that they will have to marry. Oh—I don’t know what to hope or what to fear! How can you expect me to have tea, Nancy!” she wept, as Nancy entered carrying the little tray. “It’s so good of you, my dear, but how can I eat?—I can hardly face the servants, Roger. They will all hear. And Meg was always such a pet of Johnson’s; his favourite of all my children. He used to give her very rich, unwholesome things in the pantry and once, when her father punished her for disobeying him and put her in the corner, in the drawing-room, one day, after lunch, Johnson nearly dropped the coffee, when he came in. It upset him dreadfully and he would hardly speak to Francis for a week afterwards. I know he will think it all our fault, when he hears, now. And so it is, for having trusted to a stranger. I can’t drink tea, Nancy.”

“Yes, you can, for Meg’s sake, Aunt Eleanor, and eat some tea-cake, too,” said Nancy. “If you aren’t brave for her, who will be. And you can’t be brave unless you eat. I remember so well, when I was little, Uncle Francis saying that when it came to the pinch you were the bravest woman he knew. You’ll see, darling; it will all come out better than you fear. Johnson and all of us will help you to make it come out better.”

“She is such a comfort to me, Roger,” said Mrs. Chadwick with a summoned smile. “Somehow, when I see her, I feel that things *will* come out better. *You* will have to go to court, dear, next spring. We can’t have none of our girls going. And you shall wear my pearls.” Mrs. Chadwick’s tears fell, but she took up the tea-cup.

Nancy more and more was striking Oldmeadow as the wisest person in the house. He walked with her on the terrace after tea; it was an old custom of his and Nancy’s to step outside then, whatever the weather, and have a few turns. This was a clear, chill evening and Nancy had wrapped a woollen scarf closely round her neck and shoulders. Her chin was sunken in its folds as she held it together on her breast, and with her dropped profile, her sad, meditative eyes, it was as if she saw a clue and, far more clearly than he did, knew where they all stood.

“Adrienne was bitterly opposed to Barney’s going,” he said. “She seemed unable to grasp the fact that she herself had been in error.”

Nancy turned her eyes on him. “Did Barney tell you she was bitterly opposed?”

“He didn’t tell me. I was with them. It was most unfortunate. She insisted on my coming up.”

“Oh, dear,” said Nancy. She even stopped for a moment to face him with her dismay. “Yes, I see,” she then said, walking on, “she would.”

“Why would she? Unless she was sure of getting her own way? The only point in having me up was to show me that she could always get her own way with Barney.”

“Of course. And to make it quite clear to herself, too. She’s not afraid of you, Roger. She’s not afraid of anything but Barney.”

“I don’t think she had any reason to be afraid of him this morning. He was badly upset, of course. But if I hadn’t gone up, I imagine she’d have kept him from going. And you own that that would have been a pity, don’t you?”

“Yes. Oh, yes. He had to go,” said Nancy, absently. And she added. “Were you very rough and scornful?”

“Rough and scornful? I don’t think so. I think I kept my temper very well, considering all things. I showed her pretty clearly, I suppose, that I considered her a meddling ass. I don’t suppose she’ll forgive me easily for that.”

“Well, you can’t wonder at it, can you?” said Nancy. “Especially if she suspects that you made Barney consider her one, too.”

“But it’s necessary, isn’t it, that she should be made to suspect it herself? I don’t wonder at her not forgiving me for showing her up before Barney, and upholding him against her, but I do wonder that one can never make her see she’s wrong. It’s that that’s so really monstrous about her.”

“Do you think that anyone can ever make us see we are wrong unless they love us?” Nancy asked.

“Well, Barney loves her,” said Oldmeadow after a moment.

“Yes; but he’s afraid of her, too, isn’t he? He’d never have quite the courage to try and make her see, would he?—off his own bat I mean. He’d never really have quite the courage to see, himself, how wrong she was, unless he were angry. And to have anyone who is angry with you trying to make you see, only pushes you further and further back into yourself, doesn’t it, and away from seeing?”

“You’ve grown very wise in the secrets of the human heart, my dear,” Oldmeadow observed. “It’s true. He hasn’t courage with her—unless some one is there to give it to him. But, you know, I don’t think she’d forgive him if he had. I don’t think she’d forgive anyone who made her see.”

“I don’t know,” Nancy pondered. “I don’t love her, yet I feel as if I understood her; better, perhaps, than you do. I think she’s good, you know. I mean, I think she might be good, if she could ever see.”

“She’s too stupid ever, really, to see,” said Oldmeadow, and it was with impatience. “She’s encased in self-love like a rhinoceros in its hide. One can’t penetrate anywhere. You say she’s afraid of Barney and I can’t imagine what you mean by that. It’s true, when I’m by, she’s afraid of losing his admiration. But that’s not being afraid of him.”

Nancy still pondered; but not, now, in any perplexity. “She’s afraid because she cares so much. She’s afraid because she *can* care so much. It’s difficult to explain; but I feel as if I understood her. She’s never cared so much before for just one other person. It’s always been for people altogether; and because she was doing something for them. But Barney does something for her. He makes her happy. Perhaps she never knew before what it was to be really happy. You know, she didn’t give me the feeling of a really happy person. It’s something quite, quite new for her. It makes her feel uncertain of herself and almost bewildered sometimes. Oh, I’m sure of it the more I think of it. And you know, sometimes,” Nancy turned her deep, sweet eyes on him, “I feel very sorry for her, Roger. I can’t help it; although I don’t love her at all.”

Yes. It must be true. Though he had seen Adrienne's vanity rather than her love. Nancy and Meg were united in their assurance and that must be, he saw, because they both, in their so different ways, knew what it was to care; to care so much that you were frightened. It was strange that the pang of pity that came with his new perception should be for Adrienne rather than for his dear little Nancy herself. Nancy had suffered, he knew, and her life was perhaps permanently scarred; yet, clear-eyed and unduped, he saw her as mistress of the very fate that had maimed her. Whereas Adrienne was blindfolded; a creature swayed and surrounded by forces of which she was unaware.

Nancy had deepened his sense of perplexity, his sense of taking refuge from something, and what it was came fully upon him that night when he was at last alone. Meg and her misdemeanour sank into a mere background for the image of the cold, convulsed face that he had seen that morning. Almost angrily he felt himself pushing it back, pushing it down, as if he pushed it down to drown, and again and again it re-emerged to look at him.

He fell asleep at last; but as, a year ago, on the first night of his meeting with her, he had dreamed of her, so to-night he dreamed again.

He did not see her, but she was in some dreadful plight and the sense of her panic and bewilderment broke upon him in shocks of suffering. He could not see her, but he was aware of her, horribly aware. All remained a broken, baffled confusion, but it was as though, unable to shape and assert itself, he yet felt her very being wrestling with extinction.

The sharpness had gone out of the sunlight next day and Mrs. Chadwick consented to come and sit with them in the warmest corner of the garden, the corner where, a year ago, Oldmeadow remembered, Meg had sat with him and explained to him the secret of Adrienne's power. Pitifully, with swollen eyes and trembling fingers, Mrs. Chadwick resumed her interrupted stocking while Oldmeadow read aloud from a Sunday paper the leading article on the critical situation in Ireland. "I suppose every one in London will be talking about Ulster and Sir Edward Carson, won't they?" said Mrs. Chadwick, and it was evident that she derived a dim comfort from the thought. The situation in Ireland, Oldmeadow reflected, had, at all events, been of so much service.

Upon this quiet scene there broke suddenly the sound of a motor's horn and a motor's wheels turned into the front entrance.

Mrs. Chadwick dropped her stocking and laid her hand on Nancy's arm. "Dear Aunt Eleanor—you know he couldn't possibly be back yet," said Nancy. "And if it's anyone to call, Johnson knows you're not at home."

"Lady Cockerell is capable of anything. She might sit down in the hall and wait. She must have heard by now," poor Mrs. Chadwick murmured. "That married girl of hers in London must have written. With the projecting teeth."

"I'll soon get rid of her, if it's really she," said Mrs. Averil; but she had hardly risen when the door at the back of the house opened and they saw Johnson usher forth a hurrying female figure, obviously not Lady Cockerell's; a figure so encumbered by its motoring wraps, so swathed in veils, that only Mrs. Chadwick's ejaculation enlightened Oldmeadow as to its identity.

"Joséphine!" cried Mrs. Chadwick and then, between the narrow framing of purple gauze, he recognized the dramatic, melancholy eyes and pale, pinched lips of Adrienne's maid.

"Oh, Madame! Madame!" Joséphine was exclaiming as she came towards them down the path. Her face wore the terrible intensity of expression so alien to the British countenance. "Oh, Madame! Madame!" she repeated. They had all risen and stood to await her. "He is dead! The little child is dead! And she is alone. Monsieur left her yesterday. Quite, quite alone, and her child born dead."

Mrs. Chadwick faced her in pallid stupefaction.

"The baby, Aunt Eleanor," said Nancy, for she looked indeed as if she had not understood. "Barney's baby. It has been born and it is dead. Oh—poor Barney. And poor, poor Adrienne."

"Yes, dead!" Joséphine, regardless of all but her exhaustion and her grief, dropped down into one of the garden-chairs and put her hands before her face. "Born dead last night. A beautiful little boy. The doctors could not save it and fear for her life. They will not let me stay with her. Only the doctors and the nurses—strangers—are with her." Joséphine was sobbing. "Ah, it was not right to leave her so. Already she was ill. It could be seen that already she was very ill when Monsieur left her. I came to her when he was gone. She did not say a word to me. She tried to smile. *Mais j'ai bien vu qu'elle avait la mort dans l'âme.*"

"Good heavens," Mrs. Chadwick murmured, while Joséphine, now, let her tears flow unchecked. "She is alone and Barney has left her! Oh, this is terrible! At such a time!"

"He had to go, Aunt Eleanor. You know he had to go. We will send for him at once," said Nancy, and Joséphine, catching the words, sobbed on in her woe and her resentment: "But where to send for him? No one knows where to send. The doctors sent a wire yesterday, at once, when she was taken ill; to the Paris hotel. But no answer came. He must have left Paris. That is why I have come. No telegrams for Sunday. No trains in time. I took the car. The doctor said, Yes, it was well that I should come. Some one who cares for Madame should return with me. If she is to die she must not die alone."

"But she shall not die!" cried Mrs. Chadwick with sudden and surprising energy. "Oh, the poor baby! It might have lived had I been there. No doctor, no nurse, can understand like a mother. And I shall be able to help with Adrienne. I must go. I must go at once. Mademoiselle will see that you have something to eat and drink, my poor Joséphine, and then you and I will return together. It will not take me a moment to get ready."

"It will be the best thing for them all," Oldmeadow murmured to Mrs. Averil, as, taking Joséphine's arm, Mrs. Chadwick hurried her along the path. "And I'll go with them."

A little later, while Mrs. Chadwick made ready above and Joséphine, in the hall, ate the meal that Johnson had brought for her, Oldmeadow and Nancy stood outside near the empty waiting car.

"I'll wire to you at once, of course, how she is," he said. Adrienne had put Meg out of all their thoughts. "But it's rather grotesque," he added, "if poor Barney is to be blamed."

Nancy stood and looked before her, wrapped, as she had been the day before, in her woollen scarf. "Roger," she said after a moment, "no one can be blamed; yet, if she dies, I shall feel that we have killed her."

"Killed her! What nonsense, my dear! What do you mean?" He spoke angrily because something in his heart, shaken by his dream, echoed her. The dreaming had now revealed itself as definitely uncanny. What had he to do with Adrienne Toner that his sub-consciousness should be aware of her extremity?

“I can’t explain,” said Nancy. “We couldn’t help it. It’s even all her fault. But she never asked to come to us. She never sought us out. She had her life and we had ours. It was we who sought her and drew her in and worshipped her. She never hid what she was; never in the least little way. It was for what she was, because she was so different and believed so in herself, that Barney loved her. And now because she has gone on believing in herself, we have struck her down.”

The rooks were cawing overhead and Oldmeadow was remembering his dream of a year ago, how Adrienne had come to him along the terrace saying, as she lifted her hand: “I can hear them, too.” They had drawn her in. Yet she had loved their life. She had wanted to understand it and to be part of it. He wished he could get the pale, streaked, drowning face out of his mind. “It’s generous of you, my dear child,” he said, “to say ‘we.’ You mean ‘you.’ If anyone struck her down it was I.”

“You spoke for us all, Roger. And you only spoke for us. You were always outside. I count myself with them. I can’t separate myself from them. I received her love—with them all.”

“Did you?” he looked at her. “I don’t think so, Nancy.”

Nancy did not pretend not to understand. “I know,” she said. “But I’m part of it. And she tried to love me.”

CHAPTER XVII

Oldmeadow sat in Barney’s study, Mrs. Chadwick beside him. It was Tuesday and the only news of Barney had been a letter to his mother, from Paris, where he had not found Meg, and two wires from the South of France, one to Oldmeadow and one to his wife, saying that he had found Meg and was returning alone. He had not, it was evident, received the doctor’s messages.

Oldmeadow had not seen his old friend since the Sunday night when he had left her and Joséphine in Connaught Square, and in his first glance at her this morning he saw that for her, too, Adrienne’s peril had actually effaced Meg’s predicament. It had done more. Faint and feeble as she must be, scarcely able to take possession of her returning life and, as Mrs. Chadwick told him, not yet out of danger, Adrienne had already drawn her mother-in-law back into the circle of her influence.

“You see, Roger,” she said, sitting there on the absurdly incongruous background of the Post Impressionist pictures and tightly squeezing her handkerchief first in one hand and then in the other, “You see, when one is with her one *has* to trust her. I don’t know why it is, but almost at once I felt all my bitterness against her die quite away. I knew, whatever she had done, that she believed it to be right; to be really *best* for Meg, you know. And oh, Roger, Barney has hurt her so terribly! She can’t speak of him without crying. I never saw her cry before. I never imagined Adrienne crying. She feels, she can’t help feeling, that it is because of that they have lost their baby.”

Oldmeadow ordered with difficulty his astonished and indignant thoughts. “That is absolutely unfair to Barney,” he said. “I was with them. No one could have been gentler or more patient.”

“I know you were with them. It would seem like that to you, Roger, because you are a man and men still think of women as a sort of chattel. That’s how it looks to Adrienne. So much more independence, you know, than we ever had.—Oh, I don’t say it’s a good thing! I feel that we are weaker and need guidance.”

“Chattels? Where do chattels come in here? She said that to you. Barney merely pleaded with her so that he could do what you wanted him to do.”

“I know—I know, Roger. Don’t get angry. But if I had been here and seen her I should have known that he must not go. I should have seen that she was in danger. A woman would have understood. No; you didn’t treat Adrienne like a chattel; no one could treat Adrienne like one. It was poor little Meg I meant. I see now how wrong it was to think of taking her from the man she loves; when she *has* gone, you know, so that everyone must know and there can be no good in it. And they probably *have* bought a wedding-ring. Oh, Roger, she does comfort me about Meg. She makes me feel the deeper things, the things conventions blind us to. She makes me feel that the great thing, the only thing, is to follow one’s own light and that Meg did do that. And after all, you know, Roger, Jowett had George Eliot and Lewes to breakfast and they were never married.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” Oldmeadow laughed. He could not repress his bitter mirth. “Follow your light if there’s breakfast with a clergyman at the end of it!” he cruelly suggested. Yet he was too much amused, while so incensed, for there to be much cruelty, and Mrs. Chadwick, gazing at him as if from under her twisted straw, murmured: “He *was* a sort of clergyman, Roger; and if people do what *seems* to them right, why should they be punished?”

He saw it all. He heard it all, in her echoes. The potent influence had been poured through her, all the more irresistible for the appeal of Adrienne’s peril. Adrienne, bereaved and dying; yet magnanimous, gentle and assured; always assured. How could Mrs. Chadwick’s feathers and wedding-rings stand a chance against her? They had been swept away, or nearly away, and what Nancy had seen as a possible hope was now an accomplished fact. Mrs. Chadwick had been brought to feel about Meg as Adrienne felt about her, and Oldmeadow, for his part, was not sure that the game was worth the candle. There was something more than absurd in his poor friend’s attempts to adjust herself to the new standards. They were pitiable and even a little unseemly. She began presently softly to weep. “Such a pretty baby it was, Roger. A lovely little creature—that was the first thing she said to me—‘Oh, Mother Nell, it was such a pretty baby.’ And all that she said this morning—when it was taken away—was: ‘I wish Barney could have been in time to see our baby.’ Oh, it is terrible, terrible, Roger, that he is not here! Her heart is broken by it. How can she ever forget that he left her alone at such a time. And she begged him not to go. She told me that she almost knelt to him.”

The tears, irrepressibly, had risen to Oldmeadow’s eyes; but as Mrs. Chadwick’s sentence meandered on, his thoughts were roughly jolted from their pity. “But I tell you that that is absolutely unfair!” he repeated, fixing his glass to look his protest the more firmly at her. “I tell you that I was there and saw it all. It wasn’t for the baby. She was thinking of the baby as little as Barney was; less than he was. What she was thinking of was her power over Barney. She was determined that she should not seem to be put in the wrong by his going.”

Like the March Hare Mrs. Chadwick was wild yet imperturbable. “Of course she was determined. How could she

be anything else? It did put her in the wrong. And it put Meg in the wrong. That's where we were so blind. Oh, I blame myself as much as anybody. But Barney is her husband; and he was with her and should have seen and felt. How could she beg him to stay for her danger when he would not stay for her love?"

Yes; Adrienne had her very firmly. She had even imparted to her, when it came to the issue, something of coherency. She was building up, in Barney's absence, strange ramparts against him. Barney had dragged her in the dust and there she intended to drag him. Wasn't that it? Oldmeadow asked himself as he eyed his altered friend, muttering finally: "I'm every bit as responsible as Barney, if it comes to that. I upheld him, completely, in his decision. I do still. Adrienne may turn you all upside down; but she won't turn me; and I hope she won't turn Barney."

"I think, Roger, that you might at all events remember that she's not out of danger," said Mrs. Chadwick. "She may die yet and give you no more trouble. You have never cared for her; I know that, and so does she; and I do think it's unfeeling of you to speak as you do when she's lying there above us. And she looks so lovely in bed," Mrs. Chadwick began to weep again. "I never saw such thick braids; like Marguerite in Faust. Her hands on the sheets so thin and white and her eyes enormous. I don't think even you could have the heart to jibe and laugh if you saw her."

"I didn't laugh at Adrienne, you know," Oldmeadow reminded her, rising and buttoning his overcoat. "I laughed at you and Jowett. No; Adrienne is no laughing matter. But she won't die. I can assure you of that now. She's too much life in her to die. And though I'm very sorry for her—difficult as you may find it to believe—I shall reserve my pity for Barney."

Barney needed all his pity and the sight of him on the following Sunday evening, as he appeared on his threshold, would have exorcised for Oldmeadow, if Mrs. Chadwick had not already done so, the memory of the pale, drowning face. He looked like a dog that has been beaten for a fault it cannot recognize. There was bewilderment in his eyes and acceptance, and a watchful humility. To see them there made Oldmeadow angry.

Barney had sent a line to say that he was back; but his friend had been prepared not to see him. Once engulfed in the house of mourning it was but too likely that he would not emerge for many days. And besides, what would Barney have to say to him now? But here he was, with his hollow eyes and faded cheeks, and it was with an echo of his old boyish manner of dropping in when beset by some perplexity that, without speaking, he crossed the room and sank on the sofa by the fireplace. But he had not come to seek counsel or sustainment. Oldmeadow saw that, as, after he had offered cigarettes, which Barney refused, and lighted his own pipe, he walked to and fro and watched him while Barney watched the flames. He had not come with a purpose at all. It was, again, precisely like the unhappy dog who wanders forth aimlessly, guided merely by a dim yearning towards warmth and kindliness. Barney had come where he would be understood. But it was not because he believed himself to be misunderstood that he came.

"I went to Coldbrooks, first, you know," he said presently, and with an effect of irrelevance. "I thought I'd find Mother there. So it was only on that Thursday night I got back here. None of the wires caught me."

"I know," said Oldmeadow. "It was most unfortunate. But you couldn't have got back sooner, could you, once you'd gone on from Paris."

"Not possibly. I went on from Paris that very night, you see. I caught the night express to the Riviera. They'd left Cannes as an address, but when I got there I found they'd moved on to San Remo. It was Tuesday before I found them. My one idea was to find them as soon as possible, of course. No; I suppose it couldn't be helped; once I'd gone."

"And it was quite useless? You'd no chance with Meg at all?"

"None whatever. Quite useless. Never was such a wild-goose chase. It was exactly as Adrienne had said."

"Still it couldn't have been foreseen so securely by anyone but Adrienne. Many girls would have jumped at the chance."

"Not if they'd had Adrienne to help them. We might have realized that. That's what armed Meg. I heard Adrienne in everything she said. Even Mother thinks Adrienne was right, now, you know, Roger. And it was all for Mother, wasn't it? that I went. That makes it all so particularly ironic. Only dear Mummy was never very strong at logic. She takes the line now that we're narrow-minded conventionalists, you and I, for thinking that a girl oughtn't to go off with a married man. I can't feel that, you know, Roger," said Barney in his listless tone. "I can't help feeling that Meg has done something shameful. You ought to have seen her! Positively smug! sitting there with that ass of a fellow in that damned Riviera hotel! I had the horridest feeling, too, that Meg had brought him rather than he her. I don't mean he doesn't care for her—he does; I'll say that for him. He's a stupid fellow, but honest; and he came outside and tried to tell me what he felt and how it would be all right and that he was going to devote his life to her. But I think he feels pretty sick, really. While Meg treated me as if I were a silly little boy. If anyone can carry the thing through, Meg will."

"It won't prove her right because she carries it through, you know," Oldmeadow observed.

"No," said Barney, "but it will make us seem more wrong. Not that you have any responsibility in it, dear old boy. I did what I felt I must do and mine was the mistake. It's not only Mother who thinks I've wronged Adrienne," he went on after a moment, lifting his arms as though he felt a weight upon them and clasping them behind his head. "Even Nancy, though she was so sorry for me, made me feel that I'd done something very dreadful."

"Nancy? How did you come to see Nancy?"

"Why, at Coldbrooks. She's still there with Aunt Monica. That was just it. It was my going there first, seeing her first, that upset her so. She couldn't understand, till I could explain, how it came about. She was thinking of Adrienne, you see. And I, knowing nothing, had been thinking of Mother all the time. It was too late, then, to go back at once. The next train wasn't for three hours. So I had to stay."

"And it was Nancy who had to tell you everything?"

"Yes; Nancy," said Barney, staring at the ceiling. There was a note, now, of control in his voice and Oldmeadow knew that if he had said no word of what must be foremost in both their thoughts it was because he could not trust himself to speak of it. And he went on quickly, taking refuge from his invading emotion, "Aunt Monica wasn't there. I didn't even see Johnson. I went right through the house and into the garden and there was Nancy, planting something in the border. Everything looked so natural. I just went up to her and said 'Hello, Nancy,' and then, when she looked up at me, I thought she was going to faint. Poor little Nancy. I knew something terrible had happened

from the way she looked at me."

"Poor little Nancy. But I'm glad it was she who told you, Barney."

"No one could have been sweeter," said Barney, talking on quickly. "She kept saying, 'Oh, you oughtn't to be here, Barney. You oughtn't to be here.' But no one could have been sweeter. We sat down on the old bench, you know, and she told me. That Adrienne had nearly died. That the baby was dead. I could hardly believe her, at first. I stared at her, I know, and I kept saying, 'What do you mean, Nancy?—what do you mean?' And she began to cry and I cried, too. Men do feel, Roger, all the same, even though they haven't the mother's claim to feel. I thought about our baby so much. I loved it, too. And now—to think it's dead; and that I never saw it; and that it's my fault"—his voice had shaken more and more; he had put his hand before his eyes, and, then, suddenly, he leaned forward and buried his head on the arm of the sofa.

"My poor Barney! My dear boy!" Oldmeadow muttered. He came and sat down beside him; he laid his arm around his shoulders. "It's not your fault," he said.

"Oh, don't say that, Roger!" sobbed Barney. "It's no good trying to comfort me. I've broken her heart. She doesn't say so. She's too angelic to say it; but she lies there and looks it. My poor darling! My poor, courageous darling; what she has been through! It can't be helped. I must face it. I'm her husband. I ought to have understood. She supplicated me, and I rejected her, and the child is dead."

"The child's death is a calamity for which no one can be held responsible unless it is Adrienne herself," said Oldmeadow. While Barney sobbed he was thinking intently, for this was a turning-point in Barney's destiny. He would remain in subjugation to Adrienne's conception of the wrong done her or he must be enabled to regain the sense of innocence to which he had every right. "She forced the situation on you. She chose to break rather than bend," he said. "Listen to me, Barney. I don't speak in any enmity to your wife; but listen to me and try to think it out. Don't you remember how you once said that your marriage couldn't be a mistake if you were able to see the defects as well as the beauty of the woman you love. Don't you remember that you said she'd have to learn a little from you for the much you'd have to learn from her. Nothing more reassured me than what you said that night. And I was reassured the other day by your firmness. It implies no disloyalty in you to see the defects now. It was power over you she wanted the other day and to see herself put in the right, before me; and to see me worsted, before you. You know it, Barney; you know it in your heart. And she knows it too. There was no failure of love in what you said. There was only failure of homage. You were right in opposing her. She was wrong in the issue she made. She was wrong from the first of the miserable affair in having concealed it from you. If you'd stayed behind as she wanted you to do, you'd have shown yourself a weakling and she'd have been further than ever from knowing herself in error. There is the truth; and the sooner you see it, the sooner she will."

For some time after his friend had ended, Barney lay silent, his face still hidden. But his sobs had ceased. And his silence, at last, grew too long for any disclaimer to be possible to him. He had been brought, Oldmeadow knew it from the very rhythm of his breathing, to the passionless contemplation where alone truth is visible. And what he said at last was: "She'll never see it like that."

"Oh, yes, she will," said Oldmeadow. And he remembered Nancy's wisdom. "If you hold to it firmly and tenderly and make her feel you love her while you make her feel you think her wrong."

"She'll never see it," Barney repeated, and Oldmeadow now suspected, and with a deep uneasiness, that Barney might be seeing further than himself. "She can't."

"You mean that she's incapable of thinking herself wrong?"

"Yes, incapable," said Barney. "Because all she's conscious of is the wish to do right. And she is right so often, she is so good and beautiful, that it must be like that with her. She can break; but she can't bend."

Oldmeadow was silent for a moment and Barney, on the arm of the sofa, was silent. "Of course," Oldmeadow then said, "the less you say about it the better. Things will take their place gradually."

"I've not said anything about it," said Barney. "I've only thought of comforting and cherishing her. But it's not enough. I'll never say anything; but she'll know I'm keeping something back. She knows it already. I see that now. And I didn't know it till you put it to me."

"She'll have to accept it; or to live with it unaccepted, then. You can't consider yourself a criminal to give her moral ease."

"No," said Barney after a pause. "No; I can't do that. Though that's what Mummy wants me to do. But I can be horribly sorry."

"Horribly sorry. Let the rest sink into the unspoken. When people love each other they can, I'm sure, live over any amount of unspoken things."

"It hasn't been unspoken between you and me, though, has it, Roger?" said Barney, and he raised himself and got upon his feet as he said it. "There's the trouble. There's where I *am* wrong. For she'd feel it an intolerable wrong if she knew that it hadn't been unspoken between you and me. And she'd be right. When people love each other such reticences and exclusions wrong their love."

"But since you say she knows," Oldmeadow suggested after another moment.

Barney stood staring out of the twilight window.

"She doesn't know that I tell you," he said.

"You've told me nothing," said Oldmeadow.

"Well, she doesn't know what I listen to, then," said Barney.

Oldmeadow was again conscious of the deep uneasiness. "It's quite true I've no call to meddle in your affairs," he said. "The essential thing is that you love each other. Let rights and wrongs go hang."

"You haven't meddled, Roger." Barney moved towards the door. "You've been in my affairs, and haven't been allowed to keep out. Yes. We love each other. But rights and wrongs never go hang with Adrienne."

CHAPTER XVIII

Oldmeadow did not see Barney again for some months. He met Eleanor Chadwick towards the end of April, in the park, he on his way to Mrs. Aldesey's, she, apparently, satisfying her country appetite for exercise, since she seemed to be walking fast and at random. He almost thought for a moment that she was going to pretend not to see him and hurry down a path that led away from his; but his resolute eye perhaps checked the impulse. She faltered and then came forward, holding out her hand and looking rather wildly about her, and she said that London was really suffocating, wasn't it?

"You've been here for so long, haven't you," said Oldmeadow. "Or have you been here all this time? I've had no news of any of you, you see."

"It's all been such a troubled, busy time, Roger," said Mrs. Chadwick. "Yes, I've been here ever since. But, thank goodness, the doctors say she may be moved now, and she and I and Barney are going down to Devonshire next week. To Torquay. Such a dismal place, I think; but perhaps that's because so many of my relations have died there. I never have liked that red Devonshire soil. But the primroses will be out. That makes up a little."

"I'm glad that Mrs. Barney is better. When will you all be back at Coldbrooks?"

"In June, I hope. Yes; she is better. But so feeble, still; so frail. And quite, quite changed from her old bright self. It's all very depressing, Roger. Very depressing and wearing," said Mrs. Chadwick, opening her eyes very wide and staring before her in a way characteristic of her when she repressed tears. "Sometimes I hardly know how to keep up at all. For nothing cheers her. And Barney isn't really much help. He has very little power of fighting against depression."

"You've all been too much shut up with each other, I'm afraid."

Mrs. Chadwick still held her eyes widely opened. "I don't think it's that, Roger. Being alone wouldn't have helped us to be happier, after what's happened."

"Being with other people might. You must get back to Coldbrooks as soon as possible and see Nancy and Mrs. Averil and your neighbours. That will help to change the current of your thoughts."

"People don't forget so easily as that, Roger," Mrs. Chadwick murmured, and it was now with severity, as though she suspected him of triviality. "When something terrible has happened to people they are *in* the current and Nancy and the neighbours are not going to change it. Poor Nancy; she feels it all as much as we do, I'm sure."

And that Mrs. Chadwick thought of him as unfeeling he saw. She thought of him, too, with Barney, as criminal; as responsible for the catastrophe. The old phrase of presage floated back into his mind: "She'll spoil things." She had spoiled, for ever perhaps, this deepest, dearest relation of his life. What was Coldbrooks to become to him with Adrienne Toner in possession? He said, and he was unable to keep a certain dryness that must sound like lightness, from his voice: "You are in it but you needn't keep your heads under it, you know. That's what people tend to do when they shut themselves up with their misfortunes. You and Barney and Mrs. Barney, I suspect, are engaged in drowning each other. If one of you puts their head up the others pull it down."

"I suppose you mean Adrienne does," said Mrs. Chadwick. He had not meant it at all; but now he felt sure that so, exactly, did it happen. Poor Mrs. Chadwick left to herself would have drifted to the shore by this time and Barney, at all events, would be swimming with his head up; it was Adrienne, of course, that kept them suffocating under the surface. "Well, I think it a pity you three should go off to Torquay alone," he evaded. "What's happening to the farm all this time?"

"Nancy is seeing to it for Barney," said Mrs. Chadwick. "She understands those things so well. Barney would not dream of letting the farm come between him and Adrienne at a time like this. He wants to be with her of course."

"Of course. All I mean is that I wish he could be with her at Coldbrooks. I suppose the doctor knows what's best, however."

"I'm glad to hear you own that anybody can know what's best, Roger, except yourself," said Mrs. Chadwick with her singularly unprovocative severity. "Of course she must go to the sea and of course Barney and I must be with her. She has two excellent nurses; but I would never trust the best nurse for certain things. I remember so well when I was ill myself once and saw the nurse behind a screen, eating raspberry jam out of the pot with her finger. You can't trust anybody, really." And that was all he got out of Eleanor Chadwick. Adrienne had spoiled things.

It was in June that he heard from Mrs. Averil that she and Nancy were in London for a few days staying with an old aunt in Eccleston Square. Mrs. Averil asked him to come to tea and he asked her and Nancy to do a play with him; but before these meetings took place he saw them both. It was at a Queen's Hall concert on Sunday afternoon that Mrs. Aldesey called his attention to his friends and, to his surprise, Oldmeadow saw that Barney was with them. They sat across the gangway at some little distance and his first impression of the three was that they were not happy.

"Did you know he was in town?" asked Mrs. Aldesey. "How ill he looks. I suppose he was frightfully upset about the baby, poor fellow."

Mrs. Aldesey knew nothing of the catastrophes that had followed the baby's death. He had instinctively avoided any reference to the latest progress of the Juggernaut.

"She's much better now, you know," he said, and he wasn't aware that he was exonerating Barney. "And they're all back at Coldbrooks."

"She's not at Coldbrooks," said Mrs. Aldesey. "She's well enough to pay visits and Lady Lumley told me she was coming down to them for this week-end. I wonder he hasn't gone with her."

Oldmeadow was wondering too. There was something about Barney's attitude as he sat there beside his cousin, silent and absent-minded it seemed, listening as little to the music as he looked little at her, that he would rather Lydia Aldesey had not been there to observe. They had a curiously marital appearance, the young couple, or, rather, Barney had; the air of being safe with some one with whom no explanations were needed and for whom no appearances must be kept up; some one, even, with whom he was so identified that he was hardly conscious of her. Nancy was not so unconscious. Once, when Barney leaned over to look at the programme, she drew away a little; and Oldmeadow even fancied a slight constraint in her glance when, now and then, he spoke to her. Had Adrienne spoiled things there, too? Mrs. Averil next day, in Eccleston Square, enlightened him as to Barney's presence. "It's

been most unfortunate. He had planned to come up to this concert for a long time. He wanted Nancy to hear the César Franck with him. And then it appeared that Adrienne had made an engagement for them with the Lumleys. He refused to go, I'm afraid, and she made an issue of it and, from what poor Eleanor told me, there was rather a row. So Adrienne has gone off alone and Barney is here till this evening. He's gone out now with Nancy to show her some pictures by a friend of his. It had all been arranged. So what were we to do about it, Roger?"

"Do about it? Why just what you have done. Why shouldn't she go with him?"

"Why indeed? Except that Adrienne has made the issue. It's awkward, of course, when you know there's been a row, to go on as if nothing had happened."

Oldmeadow meditated. His friend's little face had been pinched by the family's distress when he had last seen it; it was clouded now by a closer, a more personal perplexity. "I suppose she made the issue on purpose so that Barney shouldn't come up," he said at length.

"I really don't know. Perhaps it had been arranged first with the Lumleys. If it was to keep him from coming, that didn't come out. She wouldn't let it come out; not into the open; of course."

"So things are going very badly. I'd imagined, with all Barney's contrition, that they might have worked out well."

"They've worked out as badly, I'm afraid, as they could. He was full of contrition. He was as devoted as possible, when they came back in May. But nothing altered her unflagging melancholy. And I suppose what happened was that he got tired. Barney was always like that, from the time he was in the nursery. He'd go on being patient and good-tempered until, suddenly, everything would break down and he would sulk for days. It's when he's pushed too far. And she has pushed him too far. She's set them all against him."

"Who is them?" Oldmeadow asked. "I saw, when we met in London, that Mrs. Chadwick actually had been brought to look upon Barney as a sort of miscreant and Adrienne as a martyr. Who else is there?"

"Well, no one else except Palgrave and Barbara. Palgrave can be very exasperating, as you know, and he takes the attitude now that Barney has done Adrienne an irreparable injury. As you may imagine it isn't a pleasant life Barney leads among them all."

"I see," said Oldmeadow. "I think I see it all. What happens now is that Barney more and more takes refuge with you and Nancy, and Adrienne more and more can't bear it."

"That is precisely it, Roger," said Mrs. Averil. "And what are we to do? How can I shut my door against Barney? Yet it is troubling me more than I can say. We are forced to seem on his side and against her. And Adrienne has her eye upon them."

"Let her keep it on them," said Oldmeadow in strong indignation. "And much good may it do her!"

"Oh, it won't do her any good—nor us!" said Mrs. Averil. "She's sick with jealousy, Roger. Sick. I'm almost sorry for her when I see it and see her trying to hide it, and see it always, coming in by the back door when she shuts the front door on it—as it always does, you know. And Nancy sees it, of course; and is quite as sick as she is; and Barney, of course, remains as blind as a bat."

"Well, as long as he remains blind—"

"Yes. As long as he does. But Adrienne will make him see. She'll pick and pull at their friendship until Nancy will be forced into drawing back, and if she draws back Barney will see. What it's already come to is that she has to stand still, and smile, while Adrienne scratches her, lest Barney should see she's scratched; and once or twice of late I've had a suspicion that he has seen. It doesn't endear Nancy to Adrienne that Barney should scowl at her when he's caught her scratching."

"What kind of scratches?" Oldmeadow asked, but Mrs. Averil had only time to say, "Oh, all kinds; she's wonderful at scratches," when the door-bell rang and Nancy, a moment after, came in.

Nancy, if anything so fresh and neat could be so called, was looking rather dowdy, and he suspected that some self-effacing motive lay behind her choice of clothes.

"Oh, Roger, Barney was so sorry to have to miss you," she said. And, at all events, whatever else Adrienne had spoiled, she had not spoiled Nancy's loving smile for him. "He had to catch the 4.45 to Coldbrooks, you know. There's a prize heifer arriving this evening and he must be there to welcome it. You must see his herd of Holsteins, Roger." Friesians were, at that date, still Holsteins.

"I'd like to," said Oldmeadow. "But I don't know when I shall, for, to tell you the truth, I've not been asked to Coldbrooks this summer. The first time since I've known them."

Nancy looked at him in silence.

"You'll come to us, of course," said Mrs. Averil.

"Do you really think I'd better, all things considered?" Oldmeadow asked.

"Why, of course you'd better. What possible reasons could there be for your not coming, except ones we don't accept?"

"It won't seem to range us too much in a hostile camp?"

"Not more than we're ranged already. Nancy and I are not going to give you up, my dear Roger, because Adrienne considers herself a martyr."

"I hope not, indeed. But it makes my exclusion from Coldbrooks more marked, perhaps, if I go to you. I imagine, though I am so much in her black books, that poor Mrs. Chadwick doesn't want my exclusion to be marked."

"You're quite right there. You are in her black books; but she doesn't want it marked; she'd like to have you, really, if Adrienne weren't there and if she didn't feel shy. And I really think it will make it easier for her if you come to us instead. It will tide it over a little. She'll be almost able to feel you are with them. After all, you do come to us, often."

"And I'll go up with you to Coldbrooks as if nothing had happened? I confess I have a curiosity to see how Mrs. Barney takes me."

"She's very good at taking things, you know," said Nancy.

Mrs. Averil cast a glance upon him. "It may be really something of a relief to their minds, Roger," she said, "if you turn up as if nothing had happened. They are in need of distractions. They are all dreadfully on edge, though

they won't own to it, about Meg. The case is coming on quite soon now. Mrs. Hayward has lost no time, and poor Eleanor only keeps up because Adrienne is there to hold her up."

"Where is Meg? Do they hear from her?"

"They hear from her constantly. She's still on the Continent. She writes very easily and confidently. I can't help imagining, all the same, that Adrienne is holding her up, too. She's written to Nancy and Nancy hasn't shown me her letters."

"There is nothing to hide, Mother," said Nancy, and Oldmeadow had never seen her look so dejected. "Nothing at all, except that she's not as easy and confident as she wants to appear. Adrienne does hold her up. Poor Meg."

CHAPTER XIX

THE picture of Adrienne holding them up was spread before Oldmeadow's eyes on the hot July day when Mrs. Averil drove him up from the Little House to Coldbrooks. The shade of the great lime-tree on the lawn was like a canvas, only old Johnson, as he moved to and fro with tea-table, silver and strawberries, stepping from its cool green atmosphere into the framing sunshine. The Chadwick family, seated or lying in the shade, were all nearly as still as in a picture, and Adrienne was its centre. She sat in a high-backed wicker chair, her hands lying listlessly in her lap, a scarf about her shoulders, and in her black-veiled white, her wide, transparent hat, she was like a clouded moon. There was something even of daring, to Oldmeadow's imagination, in their approach across the sunny spaces. Her eyes had so rested upon them from the moment that they had driven up, that they might have been bold wayfarers challenging the magic of a Circe in her web. Palgrave, in his white flannels, lay stretched at her feet, and he had been reading aloud to her; Barbara and Mrs. Chadwick sat listening while they worked on either hand. Only Barney was removed, sitting at some little distance, his back half turned, a pipe between his teeth and his eyes on a magazine that lay upon his knee. But the influence, the magic, was upon him too. He was consciously removed.

Mrs. Chadwick sprang up to greet them. "This is nice!" she cried, and her knitting trailed behind her as she came so that Barbara, laughing, stooped to catch and pick it up as she followed her; "I was expecting you! How nice and dear of you! On this hot day! I always think the very fishes must feel warm on a day like this! Or could they, do you think?—Dear Roger!" There was an evident altering in Mrs. Chadwick's manner towards him since the meeting in the Park. She was, with all her fluster, manifestly glad to see him.

Palgrave had hoisted himself to his feet and now stood beside Adrienne, eyeing them as a faithful hound eyes suspicious visitors.

"Isn't it lovely in the shade," Mrs. Chadwick continued, drawing them into it. "Adrienne darling, Aunt Monica after all. And we were afraid the heat might keep you away. I suppose the hill was very hot, Monica?" Adrienne was still, apparently, something of an invalid, for she did not rise to greet them. Neither did she speak as she held out her hand to each of them in turn, and while an enveloping smile dwelt fondly on Mrs. Averil, she made no attempt to smile at Oldmeadow.

He found himself observing her with a sort of wonder. All the flaws and deformities of her maternity had fallen from her and she had the appearance almost of beauty. Yet he had never so little liked her face. Her dimly patterned features made him think of a Chinese picture he had once seen where, on a moth-wing background, pale chrysanthemums, mauvy-pink, a disk of carved jade with cord and tassel and a narrow ivory box softly spotted with darkness, conveyed in their seeming triviality an impression almost sinister of impersonality and magic. There was as little feeling in her face. It was like a mask.

"Where's Nancy?" Barney asked. He had got up and joined them, giving Oldmeadow's hand, as they met, a curiously lifeless shake.

"She had letters to write," said Mrs. Averil.

"Why, I thought we'd arranged she was to come up and walk round the farm after tea with me," said Barney and as he spoke Oldmeadow noted that Adrienne turned her head slowly, somewhat as she had done on the ominous morning in March, and rested her eyes upon him.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Mrs. Averil cheerfully. "She must have misunderstood. She had these letters to finish for the post."

Barbara was reconnoitring at the tea-table. "Strawberries!" she announced. "Who said they'd be over? Oh, what a shame of Nancy not to come! Roger, why aren't you staying here rather than with Aunt Monica, I'd like to know? Aren't we grand enough for you since she's had that bathroom put in!" Barbara had advanced to a lively flapperdom.

"You see, by this plan, I get the bath with her and get you when she brings me up," Oldmeadow retorted.

"And leave Nancy behind! I call it a shame when we're having the last strawberries—and you may have a bathroom with Aunt Monica, but her strawberries are over. Letters! Who ever heard of Nancy writing letters—except to you, Barney. She was always writing to you when you were living in London—before you married. And what screeds you used to send her—all about art!" said Barbara, and that her liveliness cast a spell of silence was apparent to everyone but herself.

Mrs. Chadwick took Oldmeadow's arm and drew him aside. "You'll be able to come later and be quite with us, won't you, Roger?" she said "September is really a lovelier month, don't you think? Adrienne is going to take Palgrave and Barbara for a motor-trip in September. Won't it be lovely for them?" Mrs. Chadwick spoke with a swiftness that did not veil a sense of insecurity. "Barbara's never seen the Alps. They are going to the Tyrol."

"If we don't have a European war by then," Oldmeadow suggested. "What is Barney going to do?"

"Oh, Barney is going to the Barclay's in Scotland, to shoot. He loves that. A war, Roger? What do you mean? All those tiresome Serbians? Why, they won't go into the Tyrol, will they?"

"Perhaps not the Tyrol; but they may make it difficult for other people to go there."

"Do you hear what Roger is saying?" Mrs. Chadwick turned to her family. "That the Serbians may make war by September and that it might interfere with the trip. But I'm sure Sir Edward will quiet them. He always does. Though

he is a Liberal, I've always felt him to be such a good man," said Mrs. Chadwick, "and really patriotic. Simply sitting round a table with him cools their heads more than one would believe possible. Dreadfully violent people, I believe, killing their kings and queens and throwing them out of the window. I always think there's nothing in the world for controlling people's tempers like getting them to sit together round a table. I wonder why it is. Something to do with having your legs out of the way, perhaps. People don't look nearly so threatening if their legs are hidden, do they? My poor cousin, Fanny Jocelyn, used always to say that if any of the clergymen in Fred's diocese got very troublesome her one recipe was to ask them to lunch, or, if they were very bad, to dinner. But she had wonderful tact —that gift, you know, for seeming to care simply *immensely* for the person she was talking to. Francis used to tell her that when she looked at you as if you were the only person in the world she loved she was really working out her next menu."

"I'm afraid if war comes it won't be restricted to people, like Serbians and clergymen, who can be quieted by being asked to dinner," said Oldmeadow laughing. "We'll be fighting, too."

"And who will we fight?" Palgrave inquired. After passing tea, he had resumed his place at Adrienne's feet. "Who has been getting in our way now?"

"Don't you read the papers?" Oldmeadow asked him.

"Not when I can avoid it," said Palgrave. "They'll be bellowing out the same old Jingo stuff on the slightest provocation, of course. As far as I can make out the Serbians are the most awful brutes and Russia is egging them on. But when it comes to a crime against humanity like war, every one is responsible."

"Are you ready for strawberries, Aunt Monica," Barbara interposed. "If there is a war, I hope we may be in it so that I can do some of my first aid on real people at last."

She was carrying strawberries now to Adrienne who, as she leaned down, took her gently by the wrist, and said some low-toned words to her. "I know, my angel. Horrid of me!" said Barbara. "But one can't take war seriously, can one!"

"I can," said Mrs. Averil. "Too many of my friends had their sons and husbands killed in South Africa."

"And it's human nature," said Mrs. Chadwick, eating her strawberries mournfully. "Like the poor: whom you have always with you, you know."

"Human nature is altered already a good deal more than governments imagine," said Palgrave, "and they'll find themselves pretty well dished if they try to bring on a capitalist war now. The workers all over the world are beginning to see whose the hands are that pull the strings and they'll refuse to dance to their piping. They'll down weapons just as they've learned, at last, to down tools; and without them you can do nothing. That's the way human nature will end war."

"A spirited plan, no doubt," said Oldmeadow, "and effective if all the workers came to be of the same mind simultaneously. But if those of one country downed weapons and those of another didn't, the first would get their throats cut for their pains."

"It's easy to sneer," Palgrave retorted. "As a matter of principle, I'd rather have my throat cut by a hired ruffian than kill an innocent man—even if he did belong to a nation that happened to be cleverer and more efficient than my own. That's a crime, of course, that we can't forgive."

"Don't talk such rot, Palgrave," Barney now remarked in a tone of apathetic disgust.

"I beg your pardon," Palgrave sat up instantly, flushing all over his face. "I think it's truth and sanity."

"It's not truth and sanity. It's rot and stupid rot," said Barney. "Some more tea, please, Barbara."

"Calling names isn't argument," said Palgrave. "I could call names, too, if it came to that. It's calling names that is stupid. I merely happen to believe in what Christ said."

"Oh, but, dear—Christ drove the money-lenders out of the Temple very, very roughly," Mrs. Chadwick interposed with the head-long irrelevance characteristic of her in such crises. "Thongs must hurt so much, mustn't they? He surely believed in punishing people who did wrong."

"Which nation doesn't do wrong, Mummy? Which nation is a Christ with a right to punish another? It's farcical. And punishing isn't killing. Christ didn't kill malefactors."

"The Gadarene swine," Mrs. Chadwick murmured. "They were killed. So painfully, too, poor things. I never could understand about that. I hope the Higher Criticism will manage to get rid of it, for it doesn't really seem kind. They had done no wrong at all and I've always been specially fond of pigs myself."

"Ah, but you never saw a pig with a devil in it," Oldmeadow suggested, to which Mrs. Chadwick murmured, "I'm sure they seem to have devils in them, sometimes, poor dears, when they won't let themselves be caught. Do get some more cream, Barbara. It's really too hot for arguments, isn't it," and Mrs. Chadwick sighed with the relief of having rounded that dangerous corner.

Barbara went away with the cream-jug and Johnson emerged bearing the afternoon post.

"Ah. Letters. Good." Palgrave sat up to take his and Adrienne's share. "One for you, Adrienne; from Meg. Now we shall see what she says about meeting us in the Tyrol." His cheeks were still flushed and his eyes brilliant with anger. Though his words were for Adrienne his voice was for Barney, at whom he did not glance.

Adrienne unfolded the foreign sheets, and held them so that Palgrave, leaning against her knee, could read with her.

Mrs. Chadwick had grown crimson. She looked at Oldmeadow. "Dear Meg is having such an interesting time," she told him. "She and Eric are seeing all manner of delightful places and picking up some lovely bits of old furniture." Oldmeadow bowed assent. He had his eyes on Adrienne and he was wondering about Barbara.

"What news is there, dear?" Mrs. Chadwick continued in the same badly controlled voice. Palgrave's face had clouded.

"I'm afraid it may be bad news, Mother Nell," said Adrienne looking up.

It was the first time Oldmeadow had heard her voice that afternoon and he could hardly have believed it the voice that had once reminded him of a blue ribbon. It was still slow, still deliberate and soft; but it had now the steely thrust and intention of a dagger.

"It's this accursed war talk!" Palgrave exclaimed. "Eric evidently thinks it serious and he has to come home at

once. What rotten luck."

Adrienne handed the sheets to Mrs. Chadwick. "It will all have blown over by September," she said. "As Mother Nell says, we can trust Sir Edward to keep us out of anything so wicked as a war. I am so completely with you in all you say about the wickedness of war, Paladin, although I do not see its causes quite so simply, perhaps."

It was the first time that Oldmeadow had heard the new name for her knight.

"For my part," said Barney, casting a glance at the house, Barbara not having yet reappeared, "I shall be grateful to the war if it dishes your trip to the Tyrol. It's most unsuitable for Barbara."

He did not look at his wife as he spoke. His hat brim pulled down over his eyes, he sat with folded arms and stared in front of him.

"You find it unsuitable for one sister to meet another?" Adrienne inquired. Her eyes were on Barney, but Oldmeadow could not interpret their gaze.

"Most unsuitable, to use no stronger word," said Barney, "while one sister is living with a man whose name she doesn't bear."

"You mean to say," said Palgrave, sitting cross-legged at Adrienne's feet and grasping his ankles with both hands, "that Meg, until she's legally married, isn't fit for her little sister to associate with?"

"Just what I do mean, Palgrave. Precisely what I do mean," said Barney, and his face, reddening, took on its rare but characteristic expression of sullen anger. "And I'll thank you—in my house, after all—to keep out of an argument that doesn't concern you."

"Barney; Palgrave," murmured Mrs. Chadwick supplicatingly. Adrienne, not moving her eyes from her husband's face, laid her hand on Palgrave's shoulder.

"It does concern me," said Palgrave, and he put up his hand and grasped Adrienne's. "Barbara's well-being concerns me as much as it does you; and your wife's happiness concerns me a good deal more. I can promise you that I wouldn't trouble your hospitality for another day if it weren't for her—and Mother. It's perfectly open to you, of course, to turn me out of my home whenever you like to make use of your legal privilege. But until I'm turned out I stay—for their sakes."

"You young ass! You unmitigated young ass!" Barney snarled, springing to his feet. "All right, Mother. Don't bother. I'll leave you to your protector for the present. I only wish he were young enough to be given what he needs—a thorough good hiding. I'll go down and see Nancy. Don't expect me back to dinner."

"Nancy is busy, my dear," poor Mrs. Averil, deeply flushing, interposed, while Palgrave, under his breath, yet audibly, murmured: "Truly Kiplingesque! Home and Hidings! Our Colonial history summed up!"

"She would be here if she weren't busy," said Mrs. Averil.

"I won't bother her," said Barney. "I'll sit in the garden and read. It's more peaceful than being here."

"Please tell dear Nancy that it's ten days at least since *I've* seen her," said Adrienne, "and that I miss her and beg that she'll give me, sometime, a few of her spare moments."

At that Barney stopped short, and looked at his wife. "No, Adrienne, I won't," he said with a startling directness. "I'll take no messages whatever from you to Nancy. Let Nancy alone—do you see? That's all I've got to ask of you. Let her alone. She and Aunt Monica are the only people you haven't set against me and I don't intend to quarrel with Nancy to please you, I promise you."

Sitting motionless and upright, her hand laid on Palgrave's shoulder, her face as unalterable as a little mask, Adrienne received these well-aimed darts as a Saint Sebastian might have received the arrows. Barney stared hard at her for a moment, then turned his back and marched out into the sunlight and Oldmeadow, as he saw him go, felt that he witnessed the end, as he had, little more than a year ago, witnessed the beginning, of an epoch. What was there left to build on after such a scene? And what must have passed between husband and wife during their hours of intimacy to make it credible? Barney was not a brute.

When Barney had turned through the entrance gates and disappeared—Adrienne's eyes dropped to Palgrave's. "I think I'll go in, Paladin," she said, and it was either with faintness or with the mere stillness of her rage. "I think I'll lie down for a little while."

Palgrave had leaped to his feet and, as she rose, drew her hand within his arm, and Mrs. Chadwick, her eyes staring wide, hastened to her: but Adrienne gently put her away. "No, no, dearest Mother Nell. Paladin will help me. You must stay with Aunt Monica and Mr. Oldmeadow." Her hand rested for a moment on Mrs. Chadwick's shoulder and she looked into her eyes. "I'm so sorry, Mother Nell. I meant no harm."

"Oh, my darling child! As if I did not know that!" Mrs. Chadwick moaned and, as Adrienne moved away, she turned as if half distraught to her two friends. "Oh, it's dreadful! dreadful!" she nearly wept. "Oh, how can he treat her so—before you all! It's breaking my heart!"

Barbara came running out with the cream. "Great Scott!" she exclaimed, stopping short. "What's become of everybody?"

"They've all gone, dear. Yes, we've all finished. No one wants any more strawberries. Take yours away, will you, dear, we want to have a little talk, Aunt Monica, Roger and I."

"I suppose it's Barney again," said Barbara, standing still and gazing indignantly around her. "Where's Adrienne?"

"She has gone to lie down, dear. Yes. Barney has been very unkind."

"About my trip, I suppose? He's been too odious about my trip and it's only the other day he made Adrienne cry. What possible business is it of Barney's, I'd like to know? One would think he imagined that wives and sisters were a sort of chattel. Why mayn't I stay, Mother—if you're going to talk about my trip? Adrienne has explained everything to me and I think Meg was quite right and I'd do the same myself if I were in her place. So I'm perfectly able to understand."

"I know, dear; I know; Adrienne is so wonderful. But don't say things like that, I beg of you, for it makes me very, very unhappy. And please run away for a little while, for we have other things to talk of. I'm afraid there may be no trip at all, Barbara; Meg may be coming home at once. The letters had news about it, and Eric has to go to the war—if there is a war, you see." Mrs. Chadwick spoke with a supplicatory note very unlike her usual placid if

complaining authority.

"But I'd like to hear about the letters, then. Do we really have to give up the trip? I'm sure it's Barney at the bottom of it. He's been trying to dish it from the first and I simply won't stand it from him."

"It's not Barney at all, Barbara. You shall hear all that there is to hear. And you mustn't, really, forget that Barney is your elder brother and has some right to say what you should do—even though we mayn't agree with him."

"No, he hasn't. Not an atom," Barbara declared. "If anyone has any right, except you, it's Adrienne, because she's a bigger, wiser person than any of us."

"And since you've borne your testimony, Barbara," Oldmeadow suggested, "you might obey your mother and give us the benefit of your experience on an occasion when it's invited."

"Oh, I know you're against Adrienne, Roger," said Barbara, but with a sulkiness that showed surrender. "I shan't force myself on you, I assure you, and girls of fifteen aren't quite the infants in arms you may imagine. If Adrienne weren't here to stand up for me I don't know where I'd be. Because, you know, you *are* weak, Mother. Yes you are. You've been really wobbling like anything about my trip and trying to wriggle out of it whenever you had a loop-hole, and Adrienne thinks you're weak, I know, for she told me so, and said we must help you to be brave and strong and that you belonged to a generation that had its eyes tightly bandaged from birth. So there!" And delivering this effective shot, Barbara marched away, not forgetting to pick up her plate of strawberries as she passed the table.

Mrs. Chadwick attempted to conceal her confusion by following her child's retreating figure with grave disapprobation and Oldmeadow seized the propitious moment to remark: "I can't help feeling that there's something to be said for Barney, all the same. His wife *has* set you all against him, hasn't she? I suspect Barbara's right, too, my dear friend, and that in your heart of hearts you dislike this trip of hers as much as he does. Certainly Barbara isn't a very pleasing example of Adrienne's influence."

"She is very naughty, very naughty and rebellious," poor Mrs. Chadwick murmured, twisting and untwisting her handkerchief. "I know I've not a strong character, but I never spoiled my children and dear Adrienne does, I feel, spoil Barbara by taking her so seriously and talking to her as if she were grown up, you know. I had an aunt who married at sixteen; but it didn't turn out at all happily. They quarrelled constantly and she had two sets of twins, poor thing—almost like a judgment, dear Mamma used to say. But of course Barbara is really too young to understand; and so I've told dear Adrienne. Not that she isn't perfectly frank about it. She's told me over and over again that weakness was my besetting danger and that I must stand up straight and let the winds of freedom blow away my cobwebs. So dear and original, always, you know. And of course I see her point of view and Barbara will, no doubt, be a bigger, finer person"—Mrs. Chadwick's voice trailed off in its echo. "But I don't agree with you, Roger; I don't agree with you at all!" she took up with sudden vehemence, "about the trip. I don't agree that my poor Meg is a leper to be avoided until a legal ceremony has been performed. I think that a cruel convention—cruel, base and cowardly. She must have suffered so much already. Nothing will give her so much courage as for us to be seen standing by her. Adrienne has explained all that most beautifully to Barbara. And how true love is the most sacred thing in life."

"My dear friend, Meg isn't a leper, of course, and we all intend to stand by her. But it is certainly best that a young girl like Barbara shouldn't be asked to meet, or understand, or exonerate such difficult situations."

"That's what I've tried to say to Eleanor," Mrs. Averil murmured.

"And why not, Roger! Why not!" Mrs. Chadwick cried, surprisingly yet not convincingly aroused. "Nothing develops the character so much as facing and understanding difficulty. And as for exoneration—I don't agree with you, and Adrienne doesn't agree. You and Monica are conventionalists and we must live on a higher plane than convention. I'm sure I try to, though it's very hard sometimes, but the noblest things are hardest. There is nothing to exonerate. Meg was following her own light in doing what she did."

"It's not a question of Meg, but of her situation," Oldmeadow returned.

"And because of her situation, because she is so in need of help and loyalty, you ask that Barbara should draw back her skirts from her! Oh! I knew it!" cried Mrs. Chadwick, "I knew that you would feel like that! That is why I felt it would be happier if you were not here with Adrienne."

"You need hardly tell me that," said Oldmeadow smiling. "But it's not a question of convention, except in so far as convention means right feeling and good taste. Meg, whatever her lights—and personally I don't believe that she followed them—has done something that involves pain and humiliation for all concerned with her, and whether she was or was not justified in doing it is a moral problem that a child shouldn't be asked to meet. Such problems should be kept from her until she is old enough to understand them."

Mrs. Chadwick's vehemence had only fictitiously sustained her. It dropped from her now and for a little while she sat silent, and the confusion of her heart was piteously revealed to her friend as she said at last, "If there *is* a war, it will all settle itself, won't it, for then Barbara couldn't go. I don't try to wriggle out of it. That's most unfair and untrue. I've promised Adrienne and I agree with Adrienne about it. I can't explain it clearly, as she does; it's all quite, quite different when Adrienne explains it. She seems to hold me up and you and Monica pull me down—oh, yes, you do, Roger. Of course it would kill me—I know that I should die, if Barbara were to do what Meg has done; you mustn't think Adrienne *wants* her to behave like that, you know. Adrienne only wants people to be brave and follow their light; but your light needn't be a married man, need it? And sometimes I think it isn't *really* so serious—falling in love, you know. I'm sure I thought *I* was in love half a dozen times before Francis proposed. It's a question of seeing what's best for you all round, isn't it, and it can't be best if it's a married man, can it? Oh! I know I'm saying what Adrienne wouldn't like, now; because it sounds so worldly and as if I believed in the French way. But I don't at all. I think love's everything, too. Only it always seemed to me when I was a girl that love meant white satin and orange-blossoms; and my poor, poor Meg can never wear those now. I should feel miserable, quite miserable about her, of course, if Adrienne weren't here to make me see the big, real things instead of the little ones. And Barney has been so unkind. Sneering and scoffing at everything"—her voice quivered. "However, if there's a war, that will settle it. Barbara couldn't go if there was a war."

CHAPTER XX

The war thus had its uses to Mrs. Chadwick. Barbara did not go to the Tyrol. By the end of September Oldmeadow and Barney were in training, one on the Berkshire and one on the Wiltshire downs, and Meg was ambiguously restored to her family at Coldbrooks.

Oldmeadow had not seen Barney for many days, when they met one afternoon at Paddington and travelled together as far as Didcot. They had the carriage to themselves and though Barney's demeanour was reticent there were many things about which, it was evident, he found it a relief to be communicative. It was from him that Oldmeadow learned of Meg's return.

"She'll be in a pretty box, won't she, if Hayward is killed," he said, smoking his cigarette and not looking at his friend. "He's over there, you know, and for my part I think there's very little chance of any of them coming back alive."

They both smoked in silence for a little while after this, contemplating the ordeal in which their country was involved rather than their own relation to it; but Oldmeadow's mind returned presently to Barney's difficulties and he asked him if it had been to see Hayward off that he'd just been up to London.

Barney, at this, had a quiet sardonic laugh. "Good heavens, no," he said. "Hayward went in the first week and Adrienne and Palgrave went up with Meg to see him off. Even if I'd wanted to, I'd have been allowed to have no hand in that. Adrienne is seeing to it all. Lawyers, money, I don't know what. No; I went up to spend my leave with old Boyd at his place in Chelsea. I didn't want to go home. Home is the last place I want to be just now."

Oldmeadow at this maintained a silence that could not pretend surprise and Barney continued in a moment. "Palgrave isn't coming in, you know."

"You mean he's carrying out his pacifist ideas?"

"If they are his," said Barney in his colourless yet sardonic voice. "Any ideas of Palgrave's are likely to be Adrienne's, you know. She got hold of him from the first."

"Well, after all," Oldmeadow after another moment felt impelled to say, "She got hold of you, too. In the same way; by believing in herself and by understanding you. She thinks she's right."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Barney and for a moment, an acutely uncomfortable one for Oldmeadow, he turned his eyes on his friend. "Thinks she's right! You needn't tell me that, Roger!"

It had indeed, Oldmeadow felt, hardly been decent of him.

"I know. Of course she would. But, all the same, people must be allowed to hold their own opinions."

"Must they?" said Barney. "At a time like this? Adrienne must, of course; as a woman she doesn't come into it; she brings other people in, that is to say, and keeps out herself. Besides she's an American. But Palgrave shouldn't be allowed the choice. He's dishonouring us all—as Meg has done. Poor, foolish, wretched Mother! She's seeing it at last, though she won't allow herself to say it, or, rather, Adrienne won't allow her—" He checked himself.

"Dishonour is a strong word, Barney. Palgrave is hardly more than a boy."

"Jim Errington is a year younger than Palgrave, and Peter Layard six months. They're both in. I don't think nineteen is too young to dishonour your family. If Palgrave committed a murder, he'd be hanged. But it will no doubt come to conscription and then we'll see where he'll find himself. Herded in as a Tommy. All this talk of a few months is folly."

"I know. Yes. Folly," said Oldmeadow absently. "Have you tried to have it out with Palgrave, Barney? If he only hears Adrienne's side what can you expect of him? If you leave them all to sink or swim without you, you mustn't blame Adrienne for steering as best she can."

"Sink or swim without me!" Barney echoed. "Why they'd none of them listen to me. You saw well enough how it was with them that day in July when you came up. Adrienne is twice as strong as I am when it comes to anything like a struggle and she has them all firmly under her thumb. She steers because she intends to steer and intends I shan't. I've tried nothing with Palgrave, except to keep my hands off him. Mother's talked to him, and Meg's talked to him; but nothing does any good. Oh, yes; Meg hangs on Adrienne because she's got nothing else to hang to; but she's frightfully down on Palgrave all the same. They're all united against me, but they're not united among themselves by any means. It's not a peaceful family party at Coldbrooks, I promise you. Poor Mother spends most of her time shut up in her room crying."

Barney offered no further information on this occasion and Oldmeadow asked for no more. It was from Mrs. Aldesey, some weeks later, that he heard that Eric Hayward had been killed. Mrs. Aldesey was his most punctual correspondent and her letters, full of pungent, apposite accounts of how the war was affecting London, the pleasantest experiences that came to him on the Berkshire downs, where, indeed, he did not find life unpleasant. Mrs. Aldesey made time for these long letters after tiring days spent among Belgian refugees and his sense of comradeship had been immensely deepened by the vast, new experience they were, from their different angles, sharing. It was difficult, on the soft October day, to dissociate the mere pleasure of reading her letter from the miserable news she gave. Yet he knew, stretched at ease after strenuous exercise, the canvas of his tent idly flapping above him and the sunlight falling across his feet, that it was very miserable news indeed and must miserably affect his friends at Coldbrooks. What was to become of poor Meg now? And after his mind had paused on poor Meg a pang of memory brought back the face of his setter John. Poor Hayward.

"She must, of course, find some work at once," Mrs. Aldesey wrote. "The war does help to solve problems of this sort as nothing else before ever could. She must nurse, or drive an ambulance and perhaps by the time it's all over we'll have forgotten irrelevancies that happened so long ago. Sometimes it feels like that to me and I know I'm much too old to face the world that will have grown up out of the wreckage of the world I knew." Mrs. Aldesey, still, always spoke of herself as antique, relegated and on the shelf. Rather absurd of her, as her friend pointed out in his reply, when she was obviously one of the people who were going to make the new world. She was organizing the Belgians in the most remarkable manner.

As to Coldbrooks he hesitated. He could hardly see himself writing to Mrs. Chadwick or to Meg. Of Nancy he felt a little shy. There would be too much to say to Nancy if he said anything and he allowed the anonymous calamity that had overtaken his friends to pass without comment or condolence. But after an interval of some weeks it was

from Nancy herself that he heard. Nancy seemed always to be selected as the vehicle for other people's emergencies.

"Dear Roger," she wrote. "You have heard how very unhappy we all are. It is dreadful to see poor Meg, and Aunt Eleanor makes it really worse for her. Meg wears mourning, like a widow, and she is terribly bitter about Palgrave, and about Adrienne, too. Doesn't that seem to you very strange and unjust? Adrienne is doing for Palgrave what she did for Meg—standing by him. It is all more unhappy than you can imagine. Palgrave is at New College, now, you know, and I'm writing, because Aunt Eleanor's one hope is that you may be able to talk to him. Kindly, you know, Roger; and not as if you thought him a criminal or a coward; that is worse than useless, naturally. Palgrave is very arrogant; but you know what a tender heart he really has and I am sure that he is very lonely and unhappy. So be kind and understanding, won't you? He really cares for you and trusts you more than he likes to show; and of course he would expect you to be against him."

Oldmeadow was going into Oxford in a week's time and he wrote to Palgrave and asked him to give him tea. "I've got to talk to you, if you'll let me," he said, "but I shan't make myself a nuisance, I promise you. I only want to satisfy myself that you have thought everything out, and if you have I'll be able to tell your people that they must give up tormenting themselves and you about it. I shall like talking over your work with you, too, if I may, and renewing my own Oxford memories." So conciliatory, so affectionate (and he found it easy to be affectionate to poor Palgrave) was the tone of the letter that he had a swift reply. Palgrave would be very glad to see him.

It was a melancholy, deserted Oxford into which Oldmeadow drove his little car on a late October afternoon. Most of the youths he saw were of a nondescript variety, a type to whom Oxford means scholastic opportunity and nothing more. There were dark-skinned lads from distant parts of the Empire looking, to Oldmeadow's eye, rather pitiful and doomed to disappointment, and a hurrying, absorbed little Jap had an almost empty Broad as a setting for his alien figure.

Palgrave's name was freshly painted at the bottom of a staircase in the Garden Quad and Oldmeadow mounted to rooms that most delightfully overlooked the garden and its catalpa-tree.

Palgrave was ready for him. The tea was laid and he stood at the table cutting a cake as Oldmeadow entered. But some one else, too, was ready, for there, in the window-seat, her gaze fixed on the waning golds and russets beneath, sat Adrienne Toner. Oldmeadow, very much and very disagreeably affected, paused at the door.

"Come in, Mr. Oldmeadow," said Adrienne, and there was a strange, jaded eagerness in the gaze she fixed on him. "I've only come for tea. I have to go directly afterwards. I am staying in Oxford, now, you know. To be near Palgrave."

"Meg's turned her out of Coldbrooks," Palgrave announced, standing still, over the tea-tray, his hands in his pockets while, with bent head, he looked from under his brows at Oldmeadow. "Meg, you understand; for whose sake she's gone through everything. We're pariahs together, now; she and I."

"It's not quite true or fair to say that, Palgrave," said Adrienne, whose eyes had returned to the garden. "Meg hasn't turned me out. I felt it would be happier for her if I weren't there; and for your Mother—since they feel as they do about what has happened; and happier for you and me to be together. You can't be surprised at Meg. She is nearly beside herself with grief."

Adrienne was very much altered. The magic of the lime-tree scene no longer lay about her. Her skin was sallow, her eyes sunken, her projecting mouth was at once stubborn, weary and relaxed. She had been almost beautiful on that July day and to-day she was definitely ugly. Oldmeadow saw that some intent inner preoccupation held her thoughts.

"I *am* surprised at her; very much surprised," said Palgrave, "though I might have warned you that Meg wasn't a person worth risking a great deal for. Oh, yes, she's nearly beside herself all right. She's lost the man she cared for and she can't, now, ever be made 'respectable.' Oh, I see further into Meg's grief than you do, my poor Adrienne. She's just as conventional and unheroic at heart as Mother; and that's what *she* minds—more than anything."

Oldmeadow, sunken in the deep chair Palgrave had drawn for him to the table, watched the curious interchange, and after a pause, in her jaded voice, Adrienne from the window-seat commented: "I understand her rage and misery. It's because her grief is divided and spoiled and tainted like that that she is distracted."

"Will you pour out tea?" Palgrave asked her gloomily. "You'll see anyone's side, always, except your own."

To this Adrienne, rising and coming forward to the table, made no reply. She wore a dark dress that recalled to Oldmeadow the one in which he had first seen her; the short jacket tying across white in front and white ruffles falling about her neck and hands. A small, dark hat was bent down about her face.

Strange, brooding face. What was she thinking of, Oldmeadow wondered, as he watched her hands, impeded by the falling ruffles, moving with the old, fumbling gestures among the tea-things; she had constantly to throw back the ruffles, and the tea-pot, after all, was too heavy for her. It slipped on one side as she lifted it and the hot tea poured over her hand. She kept her hold bravely and Oldmeadow rescued her.

"How stupid I am!" she said, biting her lip.

"You've scalded your hand," said Palgrave, eyeing her with his air no longer of rapturous but of gloomy devotion.

They made Oldmeadow think of comrade political prisoners moving off together in a convoy to Siberia. There was something as bleak, as heavy, as uninspired in their aspect. He could not think that Palgrave could now catch much light or flame from such a companion. They would trudge through the snow; condemned, but together; to be together was the best thing, now, that life offered them.

She said that the scald was nothing and asked to be trusted to go on with the tea, grasping the handle with resolution. Oldmeadow, however, standing beside her, insisted on filling the cups for her.

"You can be allowed to put in the milk and sugar, you see," he said. He was aware, as he thus succoured and rallied her, of an influx of feeling like the feeling that came with the uncanny dreams. Here she was, and reality had caught her. She deserved to be caught, of course; tragic, meddling Pierrot. But his heart was heavy and gentle; as in his dreams.

They sat round the table together. On the mantelpiece was a large, framed photograph of Adrienne; on the walls photographs of a Botticelli Madonna, a Mantegna from Padua and the da Vinci drawing for the Christ of the Last

Supper. Seeing Oldmeadow's eyes on them Palgrave said: "Adrienne gave me those. And lots of the books."

"And don't forget the beautiful cushions, Palgrave," said Adrienne, with a flicker of her old, contented playfulness. "I'm sure good cushions are the foundation of a successful study of philosophy."

The cushions were certainly very good; and very beautiful, as Oldmeadow commented. "That gorgeous chair, too," said Palgrave. "It ought to make a Plato of me."

It was curious, the sense they gave him of trusting him. Were they aware, if only sub-consciously, that he was feeling Adrienne, her follies and misdeeds thick upon her, ill-used? Or was it only that they had come down to such fundamental securities as were left to them and felt that with him, at all events, they were in the hands of an impartial judge?

"It's a happy life Meg and Mother lead at Coldbrooks, as you may imagine," Palgrave took up the theme that preoccupied him. "They only see Nancy and Aunt Monica, of course. Barbara is at school and Barney, as you are probably aware, never comes near his disgraced sister. Would you believe it, Roger," Palgrave went on, while Oldmeadow saw that a dull colour crept up to Adrienne's face and neck as her husband was thus mentioned, "Meg blames Adrienne now for the whole affair! About Eric and herself! Actually! On the one hand Eric is her hero for whom she'll mourn for ever and on the other Adrienne is responsible for the fact that she's not 'respectable' and can't claim to be his widow. Oh, don't ask me how she contrives to work it out! Women like Meg don't need logic when they've a thong in their hands and want to use it. And Adrienne's shoulders are bared for the lash! God! It makes me fairly mad to think of it!"

"Please, Palgrave!" Adrienne supplicated in a low voice. She did not eat. She had drunk her tea and sat looking down at her plate. "Don't think of it any more. Meg is very, very unhappy. We can hardly imagine what the misery and confusion of Meg's heart must be."

"Oh, you'll make excuses for anyone, Adrienne! You're not a shining example of happiness either, if it comes to that. It's atrocious of Meg to treat you as she does. Atrocious of her to hold you responsible."

"But I am responsible," said Adrienne, while the dull flush still dyed her face. "I've always said that I was responsible. It was I who persuaded them to go."

"Yes. To go. Instead of staying and being lovers secretly. I know all about it. And no doubt Meg would rather it had been so now. And so would Mother!" Palgrave ground his teeth on a laugh. "That's where morality lands them! Pretty, isn't it!"

A silence fell and then Adrienne rose and said that Mr. Jackson would be waiting for her. "He's coming at half-past five," she said, and, with his gloomy tenderness, Palgrave informed Oldmeadow that she was reading logic and Plato; "to keep up with me, you know."

Adrienne, smiling faintly, laid her hand for a moment on his shoulder as she went past his chair. "Come in to-night, after dinner, and tell me what you decide," she said.

"I'll have no news for you," Palgrave replied.

Oldmeadow had gone to hold the door open for her and, as she paused there to give him her hand, he heard her murmur: "Will you come down with me?"

"Let me see you to the bottom of the stair," he seized the intimation, and, as she went before him, she said, still in the low, purposeful voice, and he felt sure now that this had been her intention in coming to tea: "It's only so that you shan't think I'll oppose you. If you can persuade him, I shall not oppose it. I think he's right. But it's too hard. I mean, I hope you can persuade him that it's right to go."

She had stepped out on to the threshold at the foot of the stairs and he paused behind her, astonished. "You want me to persuade him of what you think wrong?"

She stood still looking out at the sunny quadrangle. "People must think for themselves. I don't know who is right or who is wrong. Perhaps I've influenced Palgrave. Perhaps he wouldn't have felt like this if it hadn't been for me. I don't know. But if you can make him feel it right to go, I shall be glad." She stepped out into the quadrangle.

"You mean," said Oldmeadow, following her, and strangely moved, "that you'd rather have him killed than stay behind like this?"

"It would be much happier for him, wouldn't it," she said. "If he could feel it right to go."

They were under the arch of the Library, she still going slowly, before him, and Oldmeadow stopped her there. "Mrs. Barney, forgive me—may I ask you something?" He had put his hand on her shoulder and she paused and faced him. "It's something personal, and I've no right to be personal with you, as I know. But—have you been to see Barney at Tidworth?"

As Oldmeadow spoke these Words, Adrienne turned away vehemently, and then stood still, as though arrested in her impulse of flight by an irresistible desire to listen. "Barney does not want to see me," she said, speaking with difficulty.

"You think so," said Oldmeadow. "And he may think so. But you ought to see each other at a time like this. He may be ordered to France at any time now." He could not see her face.

"Do you mean," she said, after a moment, keeping the rigidity of her listening poise, "that he won't come to say good-bye?"

"I know nothing at all," said Oldmeadow. "I can only infer how far the mischief between you has gone. And I'm most frightfully sorry for it. I've been sorry for Barney; but now I'm sorry for you, too. I think you're being unfairly treated. But yours have been the mistakes, Mrs. Barney, and it's for you to take the first step."

"Barney doesn't want to see me," she repeated, and she went on, while he heard, growing in her voice, the note of the old conviction: "He has made mistakes, too. He has treated me unfairly, too. I can't take the first step."

"Don't you love him, then?" said Oldmeadow, and in his voice was the note of the old harshness.

"Does he love me?" she retorted, turning now, with sudden fire, and fixing her eyes upon him. "Why should he think I want to see him if he doesn't want to see me? Why should I love, if he doesn't? Why should I sue to Barney?"

"Oh," Oldmeadow almost groaned. "Don't take that line; don't, I beg of you. You're both young. And you've hurt him so. You've meant to hurt him; I've seen it! I've seen it, Mrs. Barney. If you'll put by your pride everything can grow again."

“No! no! no!” she cried almost violently, and he saw that she was trembling. “Some things don’t grow again! It’s not like plants, Mr. Oldmeadow. Some things are like living creatures; and they can die. They can die,” she repeated, now walking rapidly away from him out into the large quadrangle with its grass plot cut across by the late sunshine. He followed her for a moment and he heard her say, as she went: “It’s worse, far worse, not to mean to hurt. It’s worse to care so little that you don’t know when you are hurting.”

“No, it’s not,” said Oldmeadow. “That’s only being stupid; not cruel.”

“It’s not thinking that is cruel; it’s not caring that is cruel,” she repeated, passionately, half muttering the words, and whether with tears of fury he could not say.

He stood still at the doorway. “Good-bye, then,” he said. And not looking behind her, as she went out swiftly into New College Lane, she answered, still on the same note of passionate protest: “Good-bye, Mr. Oldmeadow. Good-bye.” He watched her small, dark figure hurry along in the shadow of the wall until the turning hid it from view.

CHAPTER XXI

Palgrave, apparently, had formed no conjectures as to their conversation and was thinking still of Adrienne’s wrongs rather than of his own situation. “Did you take her home?” he said. “I see you’re sorry for her, Roger. It’s really too abominable, you know. I really can’t say before her what I think, I really can’t say before you what I think of Barney’s treatment of her; because I know you agree with him.”

Oldmeadow felt all the more able, shaken though he was by the interview below, to remember, because of it, what he thought. “If you mean that I don’t consider Barney in the very least responsible for the death of the baby, I do agree with him,” he said.

“Apart from that, apart from the baby,” said Palgrave, controlling his temper, it was evident, in his wish to keep the ear of the impartial judge, “though what the loss of a child means to a woman like Adrienne I don’t believe you can guess; apart from whose was the responsibility, he ought to have seen, towards the end, at all events, if he’d eyes in his head and a heart in his breast, that all she asked was to forgive him and take him back. She was proud, of course. What woman of her power and significance wouldn’t have been? She couldn’t be the first to move. But Barney must have seen that her heart was breaking.”

“Well,” said Oldmeadow, taking in, with some perplexity, this new presentation of Adrienne Toner; “what about his heart? She’d led it a pretty dance. And you forget that I don’t consider she had anything to forgive him.”

“His heart!” Palgrave echoed scornfully, yet with a sorrowful scorn; “He mended his heart quick enough. Went and fell in love with Nancy, who only asks to be let alone.”

“He’s always loved Nancy. She’s always been like a sister to him. Adrienne has infected you with her groundless jealousy.”

“Groundless indeed!” Palgrave reached for his pipe and began to stuff it vindictively. “Nancy sees well enough, poor dear! She’s had to keep him off by any device she could contrive. She’s a good deal more than a sister to him, now. She’s the only person in the world for him. You can call it jealousy if you like. That’s only another name for a broken heart.”

“I don’t know what Barney’s feeling may be, Palgrave, but I do know, it was quite plain to me, that Adrienne was jealous long before she had any ground for jealousy. If Nancy’s all Barney’s got left now, it’s simply because Adrienne has taken everything else from him. You don’t seem to realize that Adrienne drove him from her with her airs of martyrdom. Took vengeance on him, too; what else was the plan for Barbara going abroad with you? I don’t want to speak unkindly of her. It’s quite true; I’m sorry for her. I’ve never liked her so well. But the reason is that she’s beginning, I really believe, to find out that her own feet are of clay, while her mistake all along has been to imagine herself above ordinary humanity. All our feet are of clay, and we never get very far unless we are aware of the weakness in our structure and look out for a continual tendency to crumble. You don’t get over it by pretending you don’t need to walk and imagining you have wings instead of feet.”

Palgrave, drawing stiffly at his pipe during this little homily, listened, gloomily yet without resentment. “You see, where you make *your* mistake—if you’ll allow the youthful ass you consider me to say so—is that you’ve always imagined Adrienne to be a self-righteous prig who sets herself up above others. She doesn’t; she doesn’t,” Palgrave repeated with conviction. “She’d accept the feet of clay if you’ll grant her the heart of flame—for everybody; the wings—for everybody. There’s your mistake, Roger. Adrienne believes that everybody has wings as well as herself; and the only difference she sees in people is that some have learned and some haven’t how to use them. She may be mortal woman—bless her—and have made mistakes; but they’re the mistakes of flame; not of earthiness.”

“You are not an ass, Palgrave,” said Oldmeadow, after a moment. “You are wise in everything but experience; and you see deep. Suppose we come to a compromise. You’ve owned that Adrienne may make mistakes and I own that I may misjudge her. I see what you believe about her and I see why you believe it. I’ve seen her at her worst, no doubt, and to you she’s been able to show only her best. So let it rest at that. What I came to talk about, you know, was you.”

“I know,” said Palgrave, and he gave a deep sigh.

“Be patient with me,” said Oldmeadow. “After all, we belong to the same generation. You can’t pretend that I’m an old fogey who’s lost the inspirations of his youth and has marched so far down towards the grave that the new torches coming up over the horizon are hidden from him.”

“That’s rather nice, you know, Roger,” Palgrave smiled faintly. “No; you’re not an old fogey. But all the same there’s not much torch about you.”

“It’s rather sad, isn’t it,” Oldmeadow mused, “that we should always seem to begin with torches and then to spend the rest of our lives in quenching them. It may be, you know, that we’re only trying to hold them straight, so that the wind shan’t blow them out. However!—you’ll let me talk. That’s the point.”

“Of course you may. You’ve been awfully decent,” Palgrave murmured.

“Well, then, it seems to me you’re not seeing straight,” said Oldmeadow. “It’s not crude animal patriotism—as you’d put it—that’s asked of you. It’s a very delicate discrimination between ideals.”

“I know! I know!” said Palgrave. The traces of mental anguish were on his worn young face. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and rose to lean against the mantelpiece.” I don’t suppose I can explain,” he said, staring out at the sky. “I suppose that with me the crude animal thing is the personal inhibition. I can’t do it. I’d rather, far, be killed than have to kill other men. That’s the unreasoning part, the instinctive part, but it’s a part of one’s nature that I don’t believe one can violate without violating one’s very spirit. I’ve always been different, I know, from most fellows of my age and class. I’ve always hated sport—shooting and hunting. The fox, the stag, the partridge, have always spoiled it for me. Oh, I know they have to be killed—poor brutes! I know that; but I can’t myself be the butcher.”

“You’ll own, though, that there must be butchers,” said Oldmeadow, after a little meditation. He felt himself in the presence of something delicate, distorted and beautiful. “And you’ll own, won’t you, when it comes to a war like this, when not only our national honour but our national existence is at stake, that some men must kill others. Isn’t it then, baldly, that you profit, personally, by other people doing what you won’t do? You’ll eat spring lamb as long as there are butchers to kill the lamb for you, and you’ll be an Englishman and take from England all that she has to give you—including Oxford and Coldbrooks—and let other men do the nasty work that makes the survival of England and Oxford and Coldbrooks possible. That’s what it comes to, you know. That’s all I ask you to look at squarely.”

“I know, I know,” Palgrave repeated. He had looked at little else, poor boy. Oldmeadow saw that. “But that’s where the delicate discrimination between ideals comes in, Roger. That’s where I have to leave intuition, which says ‘No,’ and turn to reason. And the trouble is that for me reason says ‘No,’ too. Because humanity—all of it that counts—has outgrown war. That’s what it comes to. It’s a conflict between a national and an humanitarian ideal. There are enough of us in the world to stop war, if we all act together; and why, because others don’t, should I not do what I feel right? Others may follow if only a few of us stand out. If no one stands out, no one will ever follow. And you can’t kill England like that. England is more than men and institutions,” Palgrave still gazed at the sky. “It’s an idea that will survive; perhaps the more truly in the spirit for perishing in the flesh, if it really came to that. Look at Greece. She’s dead, if you like; yet what existing nation lives as truly? It is Grecian minds we think with and Grecian eyes we see with. It’s Plato’s conception of the just man being the truly happy man—even if the whole world’s against him—that is the very meaning of our refusal to go with the world.”

“You’ll never stop war by refusal so long as the majority of men still believe in it,” said Oldmeadow. “There are not enough of you to stop it now. The time to stop it is before it comes; not while it’s on. It’s before it begins that you must bring the rest of humanity not to behave in ways that make it inevitable. I’m inclined to think that ideas can perish,” he went on, as Palgrave, to this, made no reply, “as far as their earthly manifestation goes, that is, if enough men and institutions are destroyed. If Germany could conquer and administer England, I’m inclined to think the English idea would perish. And war need not be unspiritual. Killing our fellow-men need not mean hating them. There’s less hatred in war, I imagine, than in some of the contests of peaceful civilian life. Put it fairly on the ground of humanitarianism, then, Palgrave; not of nationality. It’s the whole world that is threatened by a hateful idea, by the triumph of all you most fear and detest, and unless we strive against it with all we are and have it seems to me that we fall short of our duty not only as Englishmen, but as humanitarians. Put it at that, Palgrave: would you really have had England stand by and not lift a finger when Belgium was invaded and France menaced?”

Palgrave was not ready with his reply and he turned away while he looked for it and shuffled the papers on his desk with a nervous hand. “Yes, I would,” he said at last. “Hateful as it is to have to say it—I would have stood by.” He came back to his place at the mantelpiece and looked down at Oldmeadow as he spoke. “The choice, of course, is hateful; but I think we should have stood by and helped the sufferers and let France and Germany fight it out. It always comes back to them, doesn’t it? They’re always fighting it out; they always will, till they find it’s no good and that they can’t annihilate each other; which is what they both want to do. Oh, I’ve read too many of the young French neo-Catholics to be able to believe that the hateful idea was all on one side. Their ideals don’t differ much, once you strip them of their theological tinsel, from those of the Germans. Germany happens to be the aggressor now; but if the militarist party in France had had the chance, they’d have struck as quickly.”

“The difference—and it’s an immense one—is that the militarist party in France wouldn’t have had the chance. The difference is that it doesn’t govern and mould public opinion. It’s not a menace to the world. It’s only a sort of splendid pet, kept in a Zoo, for the delectation of a certain class and party. Whereas Germany’s the *bona fide* hungry tigress at large. What you really ask of England, Palgrave, is that she should be a Buddha and lie down and let the tigress, after finishing France, devour her, too. It really comes to that. Buddhism is the only logical basis for your position, and I don’t believe, however sorry one may be for hungry tigresses, that the right way to deal with them is to let them eat you. The Christian philosophy of the incarnation is the true one. Matter does make a spiritual difference. It does make a difference, a real difference, that the ideal should be made flesh. It’s important to the world, spiritually, that the man rather than the tigress should survive.”

“Christ gave his life,” said Palgrave, after a moment.

“I’m not speaking of historical personages; but of eternal truths,” said Oldmeadow.

But he knew already that he spoke in vain. Palgrave had turned away his eyes again and on his sad young face he read the fixity of a fanatic idealism. He had not moved him, though he had troubled him. No one would move Palgrave. He doubted, now, whether Adrienne herself had had much influence over him. It was with the sense of pleading a lost cause that he said, presently, “Adrienne hopes you’ll feel it right to go.”

Palgrave at this turned a profound gaze upon him. “I know it,” he said. “Though she’s never told me so. It’s the weakness of her love, its yearning and tenderness, not its strength, that makes her want it. Because she knows it would be so much easier. But she can’t go back on what she’s meant to me. It’s because of that, in part at all events, that I’ve been able to see steadily what I mean to myself. That’s what she helps one to do, you know. Hold to yourself; your true, deep self. It’s owing to her that I can only choose in one way—even if I can’t defend it properly. It seems to come back to metaphysics, doesn’t it?”

“Like everything else,” said Oldmeadow.

“Yes. Like everything else. It would take a four-years’ course in Greats to argue it out, Roger. Come back to me—if you’re here and I’m here then—and we’ll see what we can make of it.”

“I will,” said Oldmeadow, rising, for the room was growing dark. “And before that, I hope.”

“After all, you know,” Palgrave observed, “England isn’t in any danger of becoming Buddhistic; there’s not much nihilism about her, is there, but hardly much Christianity, either. England has evolved all sorts of things besides Oxford and Coldbrooks. She’s evolved industrialism and factory-towns.”

“I don’t consider industrialism and factory-towns incompatible with Christianity, you know,” Oldmeadow observed. “Good-bye, my dear boy.”

“Good-bye, Roger,” Palgrave grasped his hand. “You’ve been most awfully kind.”

CHAPTER XXII

“Isn’t it becoming to him, Mother? And how tall he looks!” said Nancy, holding Oldmeadow off in his khaki for displayal.

He had only written a line of his failure and that he would come as soon as he could and see them all and tell in full of his interview with Palgrave. And he had motored over to The Little House this afternoon in early November.

Nancy was showing an unexpected gaiety. “What a nice grilled-salmon colour you are, too,” she said.

He divined the self-protective instinct under the gaiety. Most of the women in England were being gayer and more talkative at this time, in order to keep up. Nancy was thin and white; but she was keeping up. And she had put on a charming dress to receive him in.

“I’ve been grilled all right; out on the downs,” he said. “But it’s more like cold storage just now, with these frosts at night. Yes; the big cup, please. I’m famished for tea. Ah! that’s something like! It smells like your rose outside. I sniffed it as I waited at the door. Wonderful for such a late blooming.”

“Isn’t it,” said Mrs. Averil. “And I only put it in last autumn. It’s doing beautifully; but I’ve cherished it. And now tell us about Palgrave.”

He felt reluctant to tell about Palgrave. The impression that remained with him of Palgrave was that impression of beauty and distortion and he did not want to have to disentangle his feelings or to seem to put Palgrave in the wrong. It was so sweet, too, after the long, chilly drive over the empty uplands, to sit here and forget the war, although it was for scenes like this, for girls like Nancy, women like Mrs. Averil—with so much else—that the war was so worth fighting. He turned his thoughts back to the realities that underlay the happy appearances and was aware, as he forced himself to tell, of what must seem a note of advocacy in his voice. “He can’t think differently, I’m afraid,” he said. “It’s self-sacrifice, not selfishness, that is moving him.”

“He can’t think differently while Adrienne is living there,” said Mrs. Averil. “He didn’t tell you, I suppose, that she has now taken up her abode in Oxford in order to study philosophy with him?”

He was rather uncomfortably aware of the disingenuousness that must now be made apparent in his avoidance of all mention of Adrienne.

“I saw her,” he said, and he knew that it was lamely. “She was there when I got there.”

“You saw her!” Mrs. Averil exclaimed. “But then, of course you didn’t convince him. I might have known it. Of course she would not let you see him alone.”

“But she did let me see him alone. That was what she wanted. And she was there only in order to tell me what she wanted. She wants him to go.”

Mrs. Averil was eyeing him with such astonishment that he turned to Nancy with his explanations. But Mrs. Averil would not leave him to Nancy’s sympathy. “It’s rather late in the day for her to want him to go,” she said. “She may be sorry for what she’s done; but it’s her work.”

“Well, she’s sorry for her work. That’s what it comes to. And I’m sorry for her,” said Oldmeadow.

“Good heavens! The cleverness of that woman!” Mrs. Averil exclaimed. “If she can’t be powerful, she’ll be pitiful! She’s worked on your feelings; I can see that, Roger. And I thought you, at least, were immune. Well; she does not work on mine. I am not in the least sorry for her.”

“She’s being unfairly treated,” said Oldmeadow. “It’s grotesque that Meg should have turned upon her.”

“And Eleanor has, too, you know,” said Mrs. Averil. “It’s grotesque, if you like; but I see a grim justice in it. She made them do things and believe things that weren’t natural to them and now she’s lost her power and they see things as they are.”

“It’s because she’s failed that they’ve turned against her,” said Nancy. “If she’d succeeded they would have gone on accepting what she told them and making her their idol.”

“Adrienne mustn’t fail,” said Mrs. Averil dryly. “The only justification for Adrienne is to be in the right. If the blood of Saint Januarius doesn’t liquefy, why should you keep it in a shrine? She’s a woman who has quarrelled with her husband and disgraced her sister and brother-in-law, and broken her mother-in-law’s heart. You can’t go on making an idol of a saint who behaves like that.”

“She never claimed worldly success,” said Nancy. “She never told Meg to go so that she could get married afterwards; she never told Palgrave that war was wrong because it was easier not to fight.”

“Oh, yes, she did claim worldly success, really,” said Mrs. Averil, while her eyes rested on her daughter with a tenderness that contrasted with her tone. “Her whole point was that if you were right spiritually—‘poised’ she called it, you remember—all those other things would be added unto you. I’ve heard her claim that if you were poised you could get anything you really wanted. I asked her once if I should find a ten-pound note under the sofa-cushion every morning after breakfast if I could get poised sufficiently!” Mrs. Averil laughed, still more dryly while she still maintained her tender gaze and Nancy said, smiling a little: “She might have put it there for you if she’d been sure you were poised.”

“Well, let us bury Adrienne for the present,” said Mrs. Averil. “Tell Roger about your nursing plans. She may go to London, Roger, this winter, and I’m to be left alone.”

“You’re to be left to take care of Aunt Eleanor, if I do go,” said Nancy; and Mrs. Averil said that there must certainly be some one left to take care of poor Eleanor.

Oldmeadow went up to Coldbrooks next morning. The first person he saw was old Johnson at the door and he remembered Eleanor Chadwick’s griefs on his account. Nothing, now, could have been kept from Johnson and his face bore the marks of the family calamities. He was aged and whitened and his voice had armed itself, since the downfall of his grave, vicarious complacency, with solemn cadences.

“Yes, sir. The ladies will be very glad to see you, sir. These are sad days for them—the family dispersed as it is.”

Johnson defined the situation as he felt that it could be most fittingly defined and Oldmeadow inwardly applauded his “dispersed.”

The drawing-room, into which Johnson ushered him, had, for the first time in his memory of it, a mournful air. It had always been shabby, and these were the same faded chintzes, the same worn rugs; but now, fireless and flowerless, it neither spoke nor smiled and, with the sense it gave of an outlived epoch, it was almost spectral. The photographs all looked like the photographs of dead people and the only similitude of life was the loud, silly ticking of the French clock on the mantelpiece; Mrs. Chadwick’s cherished clock; one of her wedding-presents.

“I’m afraid it’s rather chilly, sir,” said Johnson. “No one has sat here of an evening now for a long time.” He put a match to the ranged logs, drew the blinds up farther so that the autumnal sunlight might more freely enter, and left him.

Oldmeadow went to the window and turned over the magazines, a month old, that lay on a table there.

He was standing so when Meg entered, and she had half the length of the room to traverse before they met. She was in black, in deep black; but more beautiful than he had ever seen her; her tossed auburn locks bound low on her forehead with a black ribbon, her white throat upright, her eyes hard with their readiness, their resource. Beautiful and distressing. It distressed him terribly to see that hardness in her eyes.

“How do you do, Roger,” she said, giving him her hand. “It’s good to see you. Mother will be glad.”

They seated themselves on one of the capacious sofas and she questioned him quickly, competently, while the hard eyes seemed to measure him lest he measure her. It was almost the look of the *déclassée* woman who forestalls withdrawal in an interlocutor. But, as he answered her quietly, his fond regard upon her, her defences began to fall. “It’s the only life, a soldier’s, isn’t it?” she said. “At all times, really. But, at a time like this, anything else seems despicable, doesn’t it; contemptibly smug and safe. The uniform is so becoming to you. You look a soldier already. One feels that men will trust and follow you. Didn’t you burn with rage and shame, too, when, for those four days, it seemed we might not come in?”

“I felt too sure we should come in, to burn with rage and shame,” said Oldmeadow.

“Ah! but it was not so sure, I’m afraid,” said Meg, and in her eyes, no longer hard, wild lights seemed to pass and repass. “I’m afraid that there are nearly enough fools and knaves in England to wreck us. Not quite enough, thank heaven! But, for those four days, Eric was terribly afraid. He was killed, you know, Roger, very splendidly, leading his men.”

“I know, Meg. My dear Meg,” Oldmeadow murmured.

“Oh! I don’t regret it! I don’t regret it!” Meg cried, while her colour rose and her young breast lifted. “It’s the soldier’s death! The consecrating, heroic death! He was ready. And deaths like that atone—for the others. He was not killed instantaneously, Roger.”

“I didn’t know,” said Oldmeadow, looking at her with a pitying, troubled gaze.

“He lived for a day and night afterwards,” said Meg, looking back, tearless. “They carried him to a barn. Only his man was with him. There was no one to dress his dreadful wound; no food. The man got him some water, at the risk of his own life. He was conscious until the end and he suffered terribly.”

Oldmeadow dropped his eyes before her fierce stare while, strangely, dimly, there passed through his mind the memory of the embarrassed, empty, handsome young face in the brougham and, again, the memory of his dog John. He had seen John die and his eyes of wistful appeal. So Eric Hayward’s eyes might have looked as he lay in the barn dying.

“Oh, Roger!” Meg said suddenly, seizing his hand. “Kill them! Kill them! Oh, revenge him! I was not with him! Think of it! I would have had no right to have been with him—had it been possible. I did not know till a week later. He was buried there. His man buried him.”

“My poor, poor child,” said Oldmeadow, clasping her hands.

But, at once, taking refuge from his pity and from her own desperate pain: “So you’ve seen Palgrave,” she said. “And he isn’t going. I knew it was useless. I told Mother it was useless—with that stranger—that American, with him. She has disgraced us all.—Wretched boy! Hateful woman!”

“Meg, Meg; be soldierly. He wouldn’t have spoken like that.”

“He never liked her! Never!” she cried. “I knew he didn’t, even at the time she was flattering and cajoling us. I saw that she bewildered him and that he accepted her only because she was mine. How I loathe myself for having listened to her! How I loathe her! All that she ever wanted was power! Power over other people’s lives! She’d commit any crime for that!”

“You seem to me cruelly unfair,” he said.

“No! no! I’m not unfair! You know I’m not!” she cried. “You always saw the truth about her—from the very beginning. You never fell down and worshipped her, like the rest of us. And she knew that you were her enemy and warned us against you. Oh—why did Barney marry her!”

“I never worshipped her; but I never thought her base and hateful.”

“You never knew her as I did; that was all. And I never knew her until I came back and found her doing to Palgrave what she had done to us. Paladin! Did you hear her call him Paladin? Always flattery! Always to make one think one was wonderful, important, mysterious! She forced us to go away, Roger. Sometimes I think it was hypnotism; that she uses her will-power consciously. We did not want to go. We did not want the divorce and the scandal.”

“What did you want, then, Meg?”

She felt the gravity of his tone but, like a fierce Maenad, she snatched at the torch, not caring how it revealed her. “What of it! What if we had been secret lovers! Who would have known! Who would have been harmed! Some people go on for years and years. His wife loved another man. He had no one. Why should we have been pushed—such pitiful fools we were—into displaying our love to the world and being crushed by it! Oh, he was so loyal, so brave; but it made him very, very unhappy. Oh, I was cruel to him sometimes! I used to reproach him sometimes! Oh, Roger! Roger!—” She broke into wild tears and stumbled to her feet.

As she reached the door, covering her face with her hands, her mother opened it and, meeting her on the threshold, Meg, with almost the effect of beating her aside with the other impediments to her rage and grief, pushed past her so that the knitting Mrs. Chadwick held was flung to the floor, the ball of khaki wool running rapidly away under a sofa and the socks and needles dangling at her feet.

She stood looking down at them with a curious apathy and, as Oldmeadow went to help and greet her, he saw that as much as Meg was wild she was dulled and quiet.

“Meg is so very, very violent,” she said, as he disentangled the wool and restored her sock and ball to her. She spoke with listlessness rather than sympathy.

“Poor child,” said Oldmeadow. “One can hardly wonder at it. But it makes a wretched existence for you, I’m afraid. You and she oughtn’t to be alone together.”

He drew her to a chair and, seating herself, her faded face and eyes that had lost their old look of surprise turned to the light, Mrs. Chadwick assented, “It’s very fatiguing to live with, certainly. Sometimes I really think I must go away for a little while and have a change. Nancy would come and stay with Meg, you know. But I can’t miss Barney’s last weeks. He comes to us, now, again. And it might not be right to leave Meg. One must not think of oneself at a time like this, must one?” The knitting lay in her lap and she was twisting and untwisting her handkerchief after her old fashion; but her fingers moved slowly and without agitation and Oldmeadow saw that some spring of life in her had been broken.

“The best plan would be that Meg should, as soon as possible, take up some work,” he said, “and that you and Nancy should go away. Work is the only thing for Meg now. She’ll dash herself to pieces down here; and you with her. There’ll soon be plenty to do. Nursing and driving ambulances.”

“Nancy is going to nurse, you know,” said Mrs. Chadwick. “But she won’t go as long as we need her here. She has promised me that. I don’t know what I should do without Nancy. I shouldn’t care to be nursed by Meg myself, if I were a wounded soldier. She is so very restless and would probably forget quite simple things like giving one a handkerchief or seeing that hot-water-bottles were wrapped up before she put them to one’s feet. A friend of mine—Amy Hatchard—such a pretty woman, though her hair was bright, bright red—and I never cared for that—had the soles of her feet nearly scorched off once by a careless nurse. Dear Nancy. I often think of Nancy now, Roger. I believe, you know, that if Adrienne had not come Nancy and Barney might have married. How happy we should all have been; though she has so little money.”

“I wish you could all think a little more kindly of Adrienne,” said Oldmeadow after a silence. Mrs. Chadwick had begun to knit. “I must tell you that I myself feel differently about her.”

“Do you, Roger?” said Mrs. Chadwick, without surprise. “You have a very judicious and balanced mind, I know; even when you were hardly more than a boy Francis noticed it and said that he’d rather go by your opinion than by that of most of the men he knew. I always remembered that, afterwards. Till she came. And then I believed in her rather than in you. You thought us all far too fond of her from the very first. And now we have certainly changed. Meg is certainly very violent; much more violent than I could ever be.... I am sorry for Adrienne. I don’t think she meant to do us any harm—as Meg believes.”

“She only meant to do you good, I am sure of it. I saw her in Oxford, let me tell you about it, when I went in to see Palgrave. She is very unhappy. She wants Palgrave to go. She wants him to feel it right to go. It’s not she, really, who is keeping him back now.”

“My poor Palgrave. Meg is very unkind about him; very bitter and unkind; her own brother. But it was very wrong of Adrienne to go and set up housekeeping in Oxford near him. You must own that, Roger. She may not be keeping him back; but she is aiding and abetting him always. It made Barney even more miserable and disgusted than he was before. And it looks so very odd. Though I don’t think that anyone could ever gossip about Adrienne. There is something about her that makes that impossible.”

“There certainly is. I am glad she is with Palgrave, poor boy.”

“I am glad you are sorry for him, Roger”—Mrs. Chadwick dropped a needle. “How clumsy I am. My fingers seem all to have turned to thumbs. Thank you so much. I try to make as many socks as I can for our poor men; fingering wool; not wheeling, which is so much rougher to the feet. I’m sure I’d rather march, and, if it came to that, die in fingering than in wheeling. Just as I’ve always felt, foolish as it may sound, that if I had to be drowned I’d rather it were in warm, soapy water than in cold salt. Not that one is very likely, ever, to drown in one’s bath. But tell me about Adrienne and Palgrave, Roger, and what they said.”

Mrs. Chadwick’s discourse seemed, beforehand, to make anything he might have to tell irrelevant and, even while he tried to make her see what he had seen, he felt it to be a fruitless effort.

There was indeed no enmity to plead against. Only a deep exhaustion. Adrienne had pressed too heavily on the spring and it was broken.

“I’m sure she is very sorry to have made so much mischief, but she isn’t what I thought her, Roger,” she said, shaking her head, when he had finished. “I’m sorry for her, but I used to believe her to be a sort of saint and now I know that she is very far indeed from being one.”

“The mere fact of failure doesn’t deprive you of sainthood,” said Oldmeadow, remembering Nancy’s plea. “You haven’t less reason now than you had then for believing her one.”

But even with her broken spring Mrs. Chadwick had not lost all her shrewdness. It flickered in the sad eyes she lifted from the khaki sock. “Some kinds of failure do, Roger. That gift of healing, you remember; all she could do for people in that way; she has quite, quite lost it. That is a reason. It’s that more than anything that has made me feel differently about her.”

“Lost it?” He felt strangely discomposed, little as the gift of healing had ever impressed him.

"Quite," Mrs. Chadwick repeated. "I think it distressed her dreadfully herself. I think she counted upon it more than upon anything, perhaps without knowing she did. It must have made her seem so sure to herself, mustn't it? The first time was before the war, just a little after you were here that day in the summer—dear me, how long ago it seems; and I had one of my headaches, one of the worst I ever had. I was so dreadfully troubled, you know, about Barbara and Meg. And Adrienne came and sat by me as she used to and put her hand on my forehead; and I know it wasn't my lack of faith, for I quite believed it would get well; but instead of the peaceful feeling, it grew much worse; oh, *much*. As if red hot needles were darting through my eyes and an iron weight pressing down on my head. And such tumult and distress. I had to tell her. I had to ask her to take away her hand. Oh, she felt it very much, poor thing, and grew very white and said it must be because she was still not strong; not quite herself. But I knew then that it was because she was not *right*; not what I had thought her. I began to suspect, from that very moment, that I had been mistaken; because hypnotizing people isn't the same as being a saint, is it, Roger? and—I think you said so once, long ago; and that was all that she had done; hypnotized us all to think her good and wonderful. Later on, after Meg had come, I let her try once more, though it quite frightened me; she looked so strange. And!—oh, dear—it was dreadful. It distressed me dreadfully. She suddenly put her hands before her face and sat quite still and then she burst into tears and got up and ran out of the room, crying. It made me feel quite ill. And of course I knew there could be nothing saintly about a person who made you feel like that—who could feel like that themselves, and break down."

"Even saints have their times of darkness and dryness," Oldmeadow found after a little time had passed. The picture she put before him hurt him. "It was an error of judgment to have believed her a saint because she could hypnotize you—if that was what it was; but the fact that she can't hypnotize you any longer—that she's too unhappy to have any power of that sort—doesn't prove she's not a saint. Of course she's not. Why should she be?"

"I'm sure I don't know why she should be; but she used to behave as if she were one, didn't she? And when I saw that she wasn't one in that way I began to see that she wasn't in other ways, too. It was she who made me so unjust, so unkind to poor Barney. *She* was so unjust and so unkind; and I never saw it till then. I was blind till then; though you saw very well, that day you came to Connaught Square, that it was a sort of spell she cast. It was a spell, Roger. The moment I saw her, after the baby's death, I forgot everything she'd done and felt I loved her again. She willed me to. So as to get power over me. Everything, always, with her, was to get power over other people's lives," said Mrs. Chadwick, and as he had, in the past, heard echoes of Adrienne in all she said, now he heard echoes of Meg, "It's by willing it, you know. Some people practise it like five-finger exercises. You have to sit quite still and shut your eyes and concentrate. Meg has heard how it's done. I don't pretend to understand; but that must have been her way. And she made poor Barney miserable and set me against him at once; you said so yourself, Roger, and blinded me to all the cruel things she did. It was to punish him, you know. To make him feel he was dreadfully wrong and she quite right; about Meg, and everything else; for you came in, too. It used to be so dreadful at Torquay. I knew it would be sad there; but I never guessed how sad it would be—with that horrid blue, blue sea. She used to sit, day after day, on the terrace of the house, and gaze and gaze at the sea and if Barney would come, so lovingly, and ask her what he could do for her and take her hand, oh, it was more and more mournful, the way she would look at him; that dreadful, loving look that didn't mean love at all, but only trying to break him down and make him *say* that he was down. I begged Barney's pardon, Roger, for having treated him as I did. We treated him dreadfully, all of us; because she put him, always, in the wrong. Oh, no, Roger, I'm sorry for her, but she's a dangerous woman; or *was* dangerous. For now she has lost it all and has become like everybody else; quite ordinary and unhappy."

He felt, in the little silence that, again, followed, that he could hardly better this summing-up. That was precisely what poor Adrienne Toner had become; ordinary and unhappy. The two things she would have believed herself least capable of becoming. There was nothing to be gained in urging extenuating circumstances, especially since he was not sure that there were any. Mrs. Chadwick, at bottom, saw as clearly as he did. He asked her presently, leaving the theme of Adrienne, whether she would not seriously consider going away for a little while with Nancy. "Meg could go down to The Little House," he said.

"Oh, no, she couldn't, Roger," said Mrs. Chadwick, "she won't go anywhere. She'll hardly speak to Monica. She just sits out-of-doors, all day, wrapped in a cloak, in the corner of the garden, staring in front of her, and she pays not the slightest attention to anything I say. And at night, in her room, I hear her sobbing, sobbing, as if her heart would break. I can't think hardly of Eric any longer, Roger. Isn't it strange; but it's almost as if he were my son that had been killed. And Barney may be killed," the poor mother's lip and chin began to tremble. "And you, too, Roger. I don't know how we shall live through all that we must bear and I keep thinking of the foolish little things, like your having cold feet and wearing the same clothes day after day in those horrible trenches. He suffered it all, poor Eric. No, I can't think hardly of him. All the same," she sobbed, "my heart is broken when I remember that they can never be married now."

CHAPTER XXIII

"THAT'S the way Mummy surprises one," said Barney as he and Oldmeadow went together through the Coldbrooks woods. "One feels her, usually, such a darling goose and then, suddenly, she shows one that she can be a heroine."

Barney was going to France in two days' time and Oldmeadow within the fortnight, and the Coldbrooks good-byes had just been said. It had been poor Meg who had broken down and clung and cried. Mrs. Chadwick had, to the very last, talked with grave cheerfulness of Barney's next leave and given wise advice as if he had been merely leaving them for a rather perilous mountain-climbing feat. Oldmeadow could hardly believe her the same woman that he had seen ten days before.

He was staying at The Little House and had come up on this afternoon of Barney's departure to join him at Coldbrooks and walk down with him. Barney had not yet seen or said good-bye to Nancy and her mother, and Oldmeadow had seized this, his only chance, of a talk with him. But, as they left the woods and began to climb the bare hill-side, Barney went on:

"I've wanted a talk, too, Roger. I'm glad you managed this."

“It doesn’t rob anyone of you, does it,” said Oldmeadow. “We’ll get to Chelford in time to give you a good half-hour with them before your car comes for you.”

“That will be enough for Nancy,” said Barney. “The less she sees of me, the better she’s pleased. I’ve lots of things I want to say, Roger. Of course you understand that in every way it’s a relief to be going out.”

“It settles things; or seems to settle them,” said Oldmeadow. “They take another place at all events.”

“Yes; just that. They take another place. What difference does it make, after all, if a fellow has made a mess of his personal life when his personal life has ceased to count. I’m not talking mawkish sentiment when I say I hope I’ll be killed—if I can be of some use first. I see no other way out of it. I’m sorry for Adrienne, after a fashion, for she’s dished herself, too. We made a hopeless mistake in getting married and she knows it as well as I do; and when a man and woman don’t love each other any longer it’s the man’s place to get out if he can.”

“It was about Adrienne I wanted to talk to you, Barney.” For the first time in their long friendship Oldmeadow felt that he spoke to an equal. Barney had at last ceased to be a boy. “I’ve seen her, since seeing you that last time in the train.”

“Well?” Barney inquired, as Oldmeadow paused. “What have you got to say to me about Adrienne, Roger? You’ve not said very much, from the beginning; but everything you have said has been true and I’ve forgotten none of it. I’m the more inclined,” and he smiled with a slight bitterness, “to listen to you now.”

“That’s just the trouble,” Oldmeadow muttered. “You’ve forgotten nothing. That’s what I feel, with remorse. That it was I who helped to spoil things for you both, from the beginning. You’d not have seen her defects as you did if I hadn’t shown them to you; and if you hadn’t seen them you’d have adjusted yourselves to each other and have found them out together. She’d not have resented your finding them out in the normal course of your shared lives. It’s been my opinion of her, in the background of both your minds, that has envenomed everything.”

Barney listened quietly. “Yes,” he assented. “That’s all true enough. As far as it goes. I mightn’t have seen if you hadn’t shown me. But I can’t regret you did show me, for anything else would have been to have gone through life blind; as blind as Adrienne is herself. And it’s because she can’t stand being seen through that she revealed so much more; so much that you didn’t see and that I had to find out for myself. What you saw was absurdity and inexperience; they’re rather loveable defects; I think I accepted them from the beginning, because of all the other things I believed in her. You said, too, you remember, that she’d never know she was wrong. Well, it’s worse than that. She’ll never know she’s wrong and she won’t bear it that you should think her anything but right. She’s rapacious. She’s insatiable. Nothing but everything will satisfy her. You must be down on your knees, straight down, before her; and if you’re not, she has no use for you. She turns to stone and you break your head and your heart against her. It’s hatred Adrienne has felt for me, Roger, and I’m afraid I’ve felt it for her, too. She’s done things and said things that I couldn’t have believed her capable of; mean things; clever things; cruelly clever that get you right on the raw; things I can’t forget. There’s much more in her than you saw at the beginning. I was right rather than you about that; only they weren’t the things I thought.”

Oldmeadow walked, cutting at the withered way-side grasses with his cane. Barney’s short, slow sentences seemed to sting him as they came. He had to adjust himself to their smart; to adjust himself to the thought of this malignant Adrienne. Yet what he felt was not all surprise; he had foreseen, suspected, even this. “I know,” he said at last; “I mean, I can see that it would happen just like that.”

“It did happen just like that,” said Barney. “I don’t claim to have been an angel or anything like one. I gave her as good as I got, or nearly, sometimes, no doubt. But I know that it wasn’t my fault. I know it was Adrienne who spoiled everything.”

They had come out now on the upland road. The country dropped away beneath them wrapped in the dull mole-colour, the distant, dull ultramarines of the November afternoon. The smell of burning weeds was in the air and, in the west, a long, melancholy sheet of advancing rain-cloud hid the sun. Oldmeadow wondered if he and Barney would ever walk there together again, and his mind plunged deep into the past, the many years of friendship to which this loved country had been a background.

“Barney,” he said, “what I wanted to say is this: All that you feel is true; I’m sure of it. But other things are true, too. I’ve seen her and I’ve changed about her. If I was right before, I’m right now. She’s been blind because she didn’t know she could be broken. Well, she’s beginning to break.”

“Is she?” said Barney, and his quiet was implacable. “I can quite imagine that, you know. Everyone, except poor Palgrave—all the rest of us, have found out that she’s not the beautiful benignant being she thought she was, and that bewilders her and makes her pretty wretched, no doubt.”

Oldmeadow waited a moment. “I want you to see her,” he said. “Don’t be cruel. You are a little cruel, you know. It’s because you are thinking of her abstractly; remembering only how she has hurt you. If you could see her, see how unhappy she is, you’d feel differently. That’s what I want you to do. That’s what I beg you to do, Barney.”

“I can’t,” said Barney after a moment. “That I can’t do, Roger. It’s over. She might want me back if she could get me back adoring her. It’s only so she’d want me. But it’s over. It’s more than over. There’s something else.” Barney’s face showed no change from its sad fixity. “You were right about that, too. It’s Nancy I ought to have married. It’s Nancy I love. And Adrienne knows it.”

At this there passed before Oldmeadow’s mind the memory of the small, dark, hurrying figure, the memory of the words she had spoken: “Some things are like living creatures; and they can die. They can die.”

He felt rather sick. “In that case, how can you blame your wife?” he muttered. “Doesn’t that explain it all?”

“No, it doesn’t explain it all.” There was no fire of self-justification in Barney’s voice. It was as fixed and sad as his face. “It was only after Adrienne made me so wretched I began to find it out. She was jealous of Nancy from the beginning, of course. But then she was jealous of everything that wasn’t, every bit of it, hers. She had no reason for jealousy. No man was ever more in love than I was with Adrienne. Even now I don’t feel for Nancy what I felt for her. It’s something, I believe, one only feels once and if it burns out it burns out for ever. With Nancy, it’s as if I had come home; and Adrienne and I were parted before I knew that I was turning to her.”

They had begun the final descent into Chelford and the wind now brought a fine rain against their faces. Neither spoke again until the grey roofs of the village came into sight at a turning of the road. “About money matters, Roger,” Barney said. “Mother and Meg and Barbara. If you get through, and I don’t, will you see to them for me? I’ve appointed you my trustee. I told Adrienne last summer that I couldn’t take any of her money any longer, so that, of

course, with my having thrown up the city job and taken on the farms, my affairs are in a bit of a mess. But I hope they'll be able to go on at Coldbrooks all right. Palgrave will have Coldbrooks if I don't come back, and perhaps you'll be able to prevent him handing it over to his Socialist friends."

"Palgrave would be safely human if it came to taking care of his mother and sisters," said Oldmeadow.

"Would he?" said Barney. "I don't know."

Across the village green the lights of The Little House shone at them. The curtains were still undrawn and, as they waited at the door, they could see Nancy in the drawing-room, sitting by the fire alone.

"I want you to come in with me, please, Roger," said Barney. "Nancy hasn't felt it right to be very kind to me of late and she'll be able to be kinder if you are there. You'll know, you'll see if a chance comes for me to say what I want to say to her. You might leave us for a moment then."

"You have hardly more than a half-hour, you know," said Oldmeadow.

"One can say a good deal in a half-hour," Barney replied.

Nancy had risen and, as they entered, she came forward, trying to smile and holding out her hand to each. But Oldmeadow was staying there. He was not going in half an hour. There was no reason why Nancy should give him her hand and Barney, quietly, took both her hands in his. "It's good-bye, then, Nancy, isn't it?" he said.

They stood there in the firelight together, his dear young people, both so pale, both so fixedly looking at each other, and Nancy still tried to smile as she said, "It's dear of you to have come." But her face betrayed her. It was sick with the fear that, in conquering her own heart, she should hurt Barney's; Barney's, whom she might never see again. Oldmeadow went on to the fire and stood, his back to them, looking down at it.

"Oh, no, it's not; not dear at all," Barney returned. "You knew I'd come to say good-bye, of course. Why haven't you been over to see me, you and Aunt Monica? I've asked you often enough."

"You mustn't scold me to-day, Barney, since it's good-bye. We couldn't come," said Nancy.

"It's never I who scold you. It's you who scold me. Not openly, I know," said Barney, "but by implication; punish me, by implication. I quite understood why you haven't come. Well, I want things to be clear now. Roger's here, and I want to say them before him, because he's been in it all since the beginning. It's because of Adrienne you've never come; and changed so much in every way towards me."

He had kept her hands till then, but Oldmeadow heard now that she drew away from him. For a moment she did not speak; and then it was not to answer him. "Have you said good-bye to her, Barney?"

"No; I haven't," Barney answered. "I'm not going to say good-bye to Adrienne, Nancy. It must be plain to you by this time that Adrienne and I have parted. What did it all mean but that?"

"It didn't mean that to her. She never dreamed it was meaning that," said Nancy.

"Well, she said it, often enough," Barney retorted.

"Barney, please listen to me," said Nancy. "You must let me speak. She never dreamed it was meaning that. If she was unkind to you it was because she could not believe it would ever mean parting. She had started wrong; by holding you to blame; after the baby; when you and Roger so hurt her pride. And then she wasn't able to go back. She wasn't able to see it all so differently—just to get you back. It would have seemed wrong to her; a weakness, just because she longed so. And then, most of all, she believed you loved her enough to come of yourself."

"I tried to," said Barney, in the sad, bitter voice of the hill-side talk with Oldmeadow. "You see, you don't know everything, Nancy, though you know so much. I tried to again and again."

"Yes. I know you did. But only on your own terms. And by then I had come in. Oh, yes, I had, Barney. You didn't know it. It was long, long before you knew. But I knew it; and so did she and it was more than she could bear. What woman could bear it? I couldn't have, in her place." Tears were in Nancy's voice.

"It's queer, Nancy," said Barney, "that—barring Palgrave, who doesn't count—you and Roger are the only two people she has left to stick up for her. Roger's just been saying all that to me, you know. The two she tried to crab whenever she got a chance. Well, say it's my fault, then. Say that I've been faithless to my wife and fallen in love with another woman. The fact is there, and you've said it now yourself. I don't love her any longer. I shall never love her again. And I love you. I love you, Nancy, and it's you I ought to have married; would have married, I believe, if I hadn't been a blinded fool. I love you, and I can say it now because this may be the end of everything. Don't let her spoil this, too. Nancy darling, look at me. Can't you consent to forget Adrienne for this one time, when we may never see each other again?"

"I can't forget her! I can't forget her!" Nancy sobbed. "I mustn't. She's miserable. She hasn't stopped loving you. And she's your wife."

"Do you want to make me hate her?"

"Oh, Barney—that is cruel of you."

There was a silence and in it Oldmeadow heard Barney's car draw up at the gate. He took out his watch. There were only a few more moments left them. Not turning to them he said. "It does her no good, you know, Nancy dear."

"No. It does her no good," Barney repeated. "But forgive me. I was cruel. I don't hate her. I'm sorry for her. It's simply that we ought never to have married. Forget it, Nancy, and forget her. Don't let it be, then, that I love you and don't love my wife. Let it be in the old way. As if she'd never come. As if I'd come to say good-bye to my cousin; to my dearest friend on earth. Look at me. Give me your hands. It's your face I want to take with me."

"Five minutes, Barney," Oldmeadow whispered, as he went past them. Nancy had given him her hands; she had lifted her face to his, and Barney's arms had closed around her.

CHAPTER XXIV

Mrs. Averil was in the hall. "Give them another moment," he said. "I'm going outside."

Tears were in his own eyes. He stepped out on to the flagged path of the little plot in front of the house where

strips of turf and rose-beds ran between the house and the high wall. Between the clipped holly-trees at the gate he saw Barney's car, and its lights, the wall between, cast a deep shadow over the garden.

The rain was falling thickly now and he stood, feeling it on his face, filled with a sense of appeasement, of accomplishment. They were together at last. It was not too late. At such a time, when all the world hung on the edge of an abyss, to be together for a moment might sum up more of real living than many happy years. They knew each other's hearts and what more could life give its creatures than that recognition.

Suddenly, how he did not know, for there was no apparent movement and his eyes were fixed on the pallid sky, he became aware that a figure was leaning against the house in the shadow beside him. His eyes found it and it was familiar. Yet he could not believe his eyes.

She was leaning back, her hands against the wall on either side, and he saw, with the upper layer of perception that so often blunts a violent emotion, that her feet were sunken in the mould of Mrs. Averil's rose-bed and that the cherished shoots of the new climbing rose were tangled in her clothes. The open window was but a step away.

She had come since they had come. She had crept up. She had looked in—for how long?—and had fallen back, casting out her arms so that it might not be to the ground. Her eyes were closed; but she had heard and seen him. As he stood before her, aghast, unable to find a word, he heard her mutter: "Take me away, please."

Barney's car blocked the egress of the gate and Barney might emerge at any moment. He leaned towards her and found that she was intricately caught in the rose. Her hat with its veil, her sleeve, her hair, were all entangled.

Dumbly, patiently, she stood, while, with fumbling fingers and terror lest they should be heard within—Mrs. Averil's voice now reached him from the drawing-room—Oldmeadow released her and, his fingers deeply torn by the thorns, he was aware, in all the tumult of his thought, more than of the pain, of the wet fragrance of the roses that surrounded her. He shared what he felt to be her panic.

She had come hoping to see Barney; she had come to say good-bye to Barney, who would not come to her; and his heart sickened for her at the shameful seeming of her plight. She knew now that it must be her hope never to see Barney again.

There was a narrow passage, leading to the lawn and garden, between the house and the stable walls. Thickly grown with ivy, showing only a narrow opening above, where chimneys and gables cut against the sky, it was nearly as dark as a tunnel, and into this place of hiding he half led, half carried the unfortunate woman.

With the darkness, the pungent smell of the wet ivy closed thickly, ominously about them. It was as if he and Adrienne Toner were buried there together. He heard a maid laugh far away and a boy passed on the green stridently whistling "Tipperary." It was like hearing, in the grave, the sounds of the upper world.

Adrienne leaned against the wall. The ivy closing round her, nearly obliterated her, but he could dimly see the grey disk of her face, showing the unexpectedness of contour that reveals itself in the faces of the dead. The trivial features were erased and only a shape of grief remained, strangely august and emotionless.

An eternity seemed to pass before the front door opened and Mrs. Averil's voice, steadied to a galvanized cheerfulness, came, half obliterated to a wordless rhythm. Barney's voice answered her, and his steps echoed on the flagged path. "Say good-bye to Roger for me if I don't see him on the road!" he called out from the gate. Then the car coughed, panted; the horn croaked out its cry and, above them, a shaft of light across the ivy, of which he had till then been unaware, flitted suddenly away, leaving the darkness more visible.

He heard then that she was weeping.

Putting his arm behind her, for the rain fell heavily and the ivy was drenched with it, he drew her forward and for a little while it was almost against his breast that she lay while her very heart dissolved itself in tears.

She had come, he knew it all, with a breakdown of her pride, with a last wild hope and, perhaps, a longing to atone, believing that she might snatch a word somewhere with her husband, and find her way, at this last moment, back to the heart she had so alienated. She had seen all. She had heard all. He was sure of it. It had been as an outcast that he had found her leaning there. He understood her through and through and the tender heaviness that had already so often visited his heart flooded it to suffocation.

Among her sobs, he heard her, at last, speaking to him. "Even Palgrave doesn't know. He told me—only this afternoon—that Barney was here. I thought I might find him. I was going to wait in the road. And when I got here there was no car and I was afraid that there was a mistake. That I had missed him. And I went up to the house; to the open window; and looked in; to see if he was there. It was not jealousy: not now. I did not mean to be an eavesdropper. But, when I saw them, I stayed and listened. It was not jealousy," she repeated. "It was because I had to know that there was no more hope."

"Yes," said Oldmeadow gently, while, with long pauses, she spoke on and on; to the impartial judge, to the one sure refuge; and he said "Yes" again, gently, after she had finished; a long time after. She still half lay against his breast. He had never felt such an infinite tenderness towards any creature; not since his boyhood and his mother's death.

She drew away from him at last. "Take me," she said. "There is a train; back to Oxford." She had ceased to weep. Her voice was hoarse and faint.

"Did you walk up from the station? You're not fit to walk back. I can get a trap. There's a man just across the green."

"No. Walking, please. I would be recognized. They might know me. I can walk. If you will help me."

He drew her arm through his. "Lean on me," he said. "We'll go slowly."

They went past the drawing-room windows and, softly opening, softly shutting, through the gate. The road, when it turned the corner, left the village behind; between its rarely placed trees, vague silhouettes against the sky that seemed of one texture with them, it showed its mournful pallor for only a little space before them; there was not enough light left in the sky to glimmer on its pools. The fields, on either side, vanished into obscurity. Pale cattle, once, over a hedge, put disconsolate heads and lowed and a garrulous dog, as they passed by, ran out from a way-side farm-yard, smelt at their heels, growled perfunctorily and, having satisfied his sense of duty, went back to his post. The sense of dumb emptiness was so complete that it was only after they had gone a long way that he knew that she was weeping and the soft, stifling sounds seemed only a part of nature's desolation.

Her head bent down, she stumbled on, leaning on his arm, and from time to time she raised her handkerchief

and pressed it to her mouth and nose. He did not say a word; nor did she.

As he led her along, submissive to her doom, it was another feeling of accomplishment that overwhelmed him; the dark after the radiant; after Nancy and Barney, he and Adrienne. It was this, from their first meeting, that he had been destined to mean to her. She was his appointed victim. He had killed, as really as if with a knife, the girl whom he had seen at Coldbrooks, in the sunlight, on that Sunday morning in spring, knowing no doubts. She had then held the world in her hands and a guileless, untried heaven had filled her heart. Between her and this crushed and weeping woman there seemed no longer any bond; unless it was the strange aching that, in his heart, held them both together.

PART II

CHAPTER I

Oldmeadow sat in Mrs. Aldesey's drawing-room and, the tea-table between them, Mrs. Aldesey poured out his tea. So it was, after three years, that they found each other. So it was, all over the world, Oldmeadow said to himself, that the tea-table, or its equivalent, reasserted itself in any interval where the kindly amenities of human intercourse could root themselves; though the world rocked and flames of anarchy rimmed its horizons.

It was more real, he felt that now, to sit and look at Lydia over her tea than to parch on Eastern sands and shiver in Western trenches; from the mere fact that the one experience became a nightmare while the other was as natural as waking at dawn. Horrors became the dropped stitches of life; and though if there were too many of them they would destroy the stocking, the stocking itself was made up of tea-table talks and walks in the woods with Nancy. He had just come from Coldbrooks.

So he put it, trivially, to himself, and he felt the need of clinging to triviality. The dropped stitches had been almost too much for him and the nightmare, at times, had seemed the only reality. At times he had known a final despair of life and even now he remembered that the worst might still come. One might be called upon to face the death of the whole order of civilization. Faith required one, perhaps, to recognize that the human spirit was bound up, finally, with no world order and unless one could face its destruction as one had to face the death of a loved individual, one was not secure of the spiritual order that transcended all mundane calamity. He believed, or hoped, that during these last three years, in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine, when, to the last fibre, he had felt his faiths tested, he had learned to be ready for the great relinquishment, should it be required of him; and it was therefore the easier to doff that consciousness, as he might have doffed a sword, and think of Lydia and of the order that still survived and that she still stood for.

Lydia did not look the worse for the war; indeed she looked the better. She looked as if, in spite of long days in the hospital, she digested better and, in spite of air-raids, slept better, and as they talked, finding their way back to intimacy by the comparing of such superficialities, she told him that for years she hadn't been so strong or well. "Nothing is so good for you, I've found out, as to feel that you are being used; being used by something worth while. People like myself must keep still about our experiences, for we've had none that bear talking of. But even the others, even the people bereaved unspeakably, are strangely lifted up. And I believe that the populace enjoys the air-raids rather than the reverse; they give them a chance of feeling that they are enduring something, too; with good-humour and pluck. If anyone is pessimistic about the effect of war on average human nature, I should only ask them to come and talk to our men at the hospital. Of course, under it all, there's the ominous roar in one's ears all the time."

"Do you mean the air-raids?" he asked her and, shaking her head, showing him that she, too, had seen with him and, he believed, with him accepted: "No; I mean the roar of nation after nation collapsing into the abyss. A sort of tumbril roar of civilization, Roger. And, for that, there's always the last resource of going gallantly to the guillotine. But all the same, I believe we shall pull through."

It was the spring of 1918 and one needed faith to believe it. She asked him presently about his friends at Coldbrooks. He had gone to Coldbrooks for three days of his one week's leave. After this he went to France.

"What changes for you there, poor Roger," said Mrs. Aldesey.

"Yes. Terrible changes. Palgrave dead and Barney broken. Yet, do you know, it's not as sad as it was. Something's come back to it. Nancy sits by him and holds his hand and is his joy and comfort."

"Will he recover?"

"Not in the sense of being really mended. He'll go on crutches, always, if he gets up. But the doctors now hope that the injury to the back isn't permanent."

"And Meg's married," said Mrs. Aldesey after a little pause. "Have you seen her?"

"No. She runs a hospital in the country, at her husband's place, Nancy tells me; and is very happy."

"Very. Has a fine boy, and is completely reinstated. It's a remarkable ending to the story, isn't it? She met him at the front, you know, driving her ambulance; and he has twice as much in him as poor Eric Hayward."

"Remarkable. Yet Meg's a person who only needs her chance. She's the sort that always comes out on top."

"Does it comfort her mother a little for all she's suffered to see her on top?"

"It almost comically comforts her. All the same, Eleanor Chadwick has her depths. Nothing will ever comfort her for Palgrave's death."

"I understand that," said Mrs. Aldesey. "Nothing could. How she must envy the happy mothers whose boys were killed at the front. To have one's boy die in prison as a conscientious objector must be the bitterest thing the war has given any mother to bear."

“He was a dear boy,” said Oldmeadow. “Heroically wrong-minded.” He could hardly bear to think of Palgrave.

“He wasn’t alone, you know,” said Mrs. Aldesey after a moment. Something was approaching that he would rather not have to speak of; a name he would so much rather not name. And, evading it, feebly, he said, “His mother got to him in time, I know.”

“Yes. But all the time. She went and lived near the prison. Adrienne Toner I mean.”

Her eyes were on him and he hoped that no readjustment of his features was visible. “Oh, yes. Nancy told me that,” he said.

“What’s become of her, Roger?” Mrs. Aldesey asked. “Since Charlie was killed the Lumleys have lived in the country and I hardly see them. I haven’t heard a word of her for years.”

He was keeping his eyes on her and he knew from her expression that he showed some strain or some distress.

“Nor have I. Nancy said that they hadn’t either. She went away, after Palgrave’s death. Disappeared completely.”

“Nancy told you, of course, about the money; the little fortune she gave Palgrave, so that he could leave it to his mother?”

“Oh, yes. Nancy wrote to me of that.”

“It was cleverly contrived, wasn’t it. They are quite tied up to it, aren’t they; whatever they may feel. No one could object to her giving a fortune to the boy she’d ruined. I admired that in her, I must confess; the way she managed it. And then her disappearance.”

“Very clever indeed,” said Oldmeadow. “All that remains for her to do now is to manage to get killed. And that’s easily managed. Perhaps she is killed.”

He did not intend that his voice should be emptier or dryer, yet Lydia looked at him with a closer attention.

“Barney and Nancy could get married then,” she said.

“Yes. Exactly. They could get married.”

“That’s what you want, isn’t it, Roger?”

“Want her to be killed, or them to be married?”

“Well, as you say, so many people *are* being killed. One more or less, if it’s in such a good cause as their marriage—”

“It’s certainly a good cause. But I don’t like the dilemma,” said Oldmeadow.

He knew from the way she looked at him, discreet and disguised as her recognition was, that he was hiding something from her. Casting about his mind, in the distress that took the form of confusion, he could himself find nothing that he hid, or wished to hide, unless it was the end of Adrienne’s story as Barney’s wife. That wasn’t for him to show; ever; to anyone.

“Perhaps she’s gone back to America,” said Mrs. Aldesey presently, “California, you know. Or Chicago. She may very well be engaged in great enterprises out there that we never hear of. They’d be sure to be great, wouldn’t they.”

“I suppose they would.”

“You saw her once more, didn’t you, at the time you saw Palgrave,” Mrs. Aldesey went on. “Lady Lumley told me of that. And how kind you had been. Adrienne had spoken of it. You were sorry for them both, I suppose; for her as well as for him, in spite of everything. Or did she merely take it for granted that the kindness to him extended to her?”

“Not at all. It was for her too,” said Oldmeadow, staring a little and gathering together, after this lapse of time that seemed so immense, his memories of that other tea-table set up in the chaos: Palgrave’s tea-table on that distant day in Oxford. What was so confusing him was his consciousness that it hadn’t been the last time he had seen Adrienne. “I was as sorry for her as for him,” he went on. “Sorrier. There was so much more in her than I’d supposed. She was capable of intense suffering.”

“In losing her husband’s affections, you mean? You never suspected her of being inhuman, surely? Lady Lumley blamed poor Barney for all that sad story. But, even from her account, I could see his side very plainly.”

“Perhaps I did think her inhuman. At all events I thought her invulnerable.”

“Yes. I remember. With all her absurdity you thought she had great power.” Mrs. Aldesey looked at him thoughtfully. “And it was when you found she hadn’t that you could be sorry for her.”

“Not at all,” said Oldmeadow again. “I still think she has great power. People can have power and go to pieces.”

“Did she go to pieces? That day in Oxford? I can’t imagine her in pieces, you know.”

He had a feeling of drawing back; or of drawing Adrienne back. “In the sense of being so unhappy, so obviously unhappy, over Palgrave,” he said.

He saw that Lydia would have liked to go on questioning, as, of course, it would have been perfectly natural for her to do. Was not Adrienne Toner and her absurdity one of their pet themes? Yet she desisted. She desisted and it was because she felt some change in him; some shrinking and some pain. “Well, let’s hope that she is happy, now, or as happy as she can be, poor thing, doing great deeds in America,” she said. And she turned the talk back to civilization and its danger.

They talked a good deal about civilization during their last three days together. He wanted things, during these three days of mingled recovery and farewell, to be as happy as possible between him and his friend, for he knew that Lydia’s heart was heavy, for him and not for civilization. The front to which he was going was more real to her, because it was much nearer, and his peril was more real than during his absence in distant climes. He felt himself that the French front, at this special time, would probably make an end of him and, for the first time since their early friendship, he knew conjecture as to his relation with Lydia; wondered, if it had not been for Mr. Aldesey in New York, whether Lydia might have been in love with him, and realized, with a curious sense of anxiety and responsibility, that her friendship for him now was the closest tie in her life. The war might to her, too, mean irreparable loss. And he was sorry that it was so; sorry to think that the easy, happy intercourse had this hidden depth of latent suffering.

Lydia's feeling, and its implications, became the clearer to him when, on their last evening together, she said to him suddenly: "Perhaps you'll see her over there."

He could not pretend not to know whom she meant, nor could he pretend to himself not to see that if it troubled Lydia that he should be sorry for Adrienne that could only be because she cared far more for him than he had ever guessed.

He said, as easily as he could manage it, for the pressure of his realizations made him feel a little queer: "Not if she's in America."

"Ah, but perhaps she's come back from America," said Mrs. Aldesey. "She's a great traveller. What will you do with her if you do find her? Bring her back to Barney?"

"Hardly that," he said. "There'd be no point in bringing her back to Barney, would there?"

"Well, then, what would you do with her?" Mrs. Aldesey smiled, as if with a return to their old light dealing with the theme, while, still in her nurse's coiffe and dress, she leaned back against her chair.

"What would she do with me, rather, isn't it?" he asked. And he, too, tried to be light.

"She'll be mended then, you think? Able to do things to people again?"

"I'm not at all afraid of her, you know. She never did me any harm," he said.

"Because you were as strong as she, you mean. She did other people harm, surely. You warned me once to keep away from her unless I wanted to lose my toes and fingers," Mrs. Aldesey still smiled. "She does make people lose things, doesn't she?"

"Well, she makes them gain things, too. Fortunes for instance. Perhaps if I find her, she'll give me a fortune."

"But that's only when she's ruined you," she reminded him.

"And it's she who's ruined now," he felt bound to remind her; no longer lightly.

Leaning back in her chair, her faded little face framed in white, Mrs. Aldesey looked at once younger yet more tired than he had ever seen her look and she sat for a little while silent; as if she had forgotten Adrienne Toner and were thinking only of their parting. But all her gaiety had fallen from her as she said at last: "I can be sorry for her, too; if she's really ruined. If she still loves him when he has ceased to care for her. Does she, do you think?"

With the question he seemed to see a fire-lit room and lovers who had found each other and to smell wet roses. Lydia was coming too near; too near the other figure, outside the window, fallen back with outstretched arms against the roses. And again he felt himself softly, cautiously, disentangle the sleeve, the hair, felt himself draw Adrienne away into the darkness where the smell was now of wet ivy and where he could see only the shape of an accepting grief.

"How could I know?" he said. "She was very unhappy when I last saw her. But three years have passed and people can mend in three years."

"Especially in America," Mrs. Aldesey suggested. "It's a wonderful place for mending. Let's hope she's there. Let's hope that we shall never, any of us, ever hear of her again. That would be much the happiest thing, wouldn't it?"

He was obliged to say that it would certainly be much the happiest thing; and he was too unhappy about Lydia to be able to feel angry with her. He knew how tired she must be when, for the first time in their long friendship, she must know that she was not pleasing him, yet not be able to help herself.

CHAPTER II

"Good Lord!" Oldmeadow heard himself groaning.

Even as he took possession of his physical suffering he knew that there was satisfaction in suffering, at last, himself. Until now the worst part of war had been to see the sufferings of others. This was at last the real thing; but it was so mingled with acquiescence that it ceased to be the mere raw fact. "We're all together, now," he thought, and he felt himself, even as he groaned, lifted on a wave of beatitude.

Until now he had not, as a consciousness, known anything. There was a shape in his memory, a mere immense black blot shot with fiery lights. It must symbolize the moment when the shell struck him, bending, in the trench, over his watch and his calculations. And after that there were detached visions, the ceiling of a train where he had swung in a hammock bed, looking up; clean sheets, miraculously clean and the face of a black-browed nurse who reminded him of Trixie. The smell of chloroform was over everything. It bound everything together so that days might have passed since the black blot and since he lay here, again in clean sheets, the sweet, thick smell closing round him and a raging thirst in his throat. He knew that he had just been carried in from the operating room and he groaned again "Good Lord," feeling the pain snatch as if with fangs and claws at his thigh and belly, and muttered, "Water!"

Something sweet, but differently sweet from the smell, sharp, too, and insidious, touched his lips and opening them obediently, as a young bird opens its bill to the parent bird, he felt a swab passed round his parched mouth and saw the black-browed nurse. "Not water, yet, you know," she said. "This is lemon and glycerine and will help you wonderfully."

He wanted to ask something about Paris and the long-distance gun firing on it every day and he seemed to see it over the edge of the trench, far away on the horizon of No-man's-land, a tiny city flaming far into the sky. But other words bubbled up and he heard himself crying: "Mother! Mother!" and remembered, stopping himself with an act of will, that they all said that when they were dying. But as he closed his eyes he felt her very near and knew that it would be sweet to die and find her.

A long time must have passed. Was it days or only the time of daylight? It was night now and a shaded light shone from a recess behind him and thoughts, visions, memories raced through his mind. Nancy; Barney; he would never see them again, then: poor Lydia and civilization. "Civilization will see me out," he thought and he wondered if they had taken off the wings of the Flying Victory when they packed her.

A rhythm was beating in his brain. Music was it? Something of Bach's? It gathered words to itself and shaped itself sentence by sentence into something he had heard? or read? Ah, he was glad to have found it. "Under the orders of your devoted officers you will march against the enemy or fall where you stand, facing the foe. To those who die I say: You will not die: you will enter living into immortality, and God will receive you into his bosom." He seemed to listen to the words as he lay, quietly smiling. But it was music after all for, as he listened, they merged into the "St. Matthew Passion." He had heard it, of course, with Lydia, at the Temple. But Lydia did not really care very much for Bach. She might care more for "Litanei." She had sung it standing beside him with foolish white roses over her ears. How unlike Lydia to wear those roses. And was it Lydia who stood there? A mental perplexity mingled with the physical pain and spoiled his peace. It was not Lydia's, that white face in the coffin with wet ivy behind it. What suffering was this that beat upon his heart? The music had faded all away and he saw faces everywhere, dying faces; and blood and terrible mutilations. All the suffering of the war, worse, far worse than the mere claws and fangs that tore at him. Dying boys choked out their breaths in agonies of conscious loneliness, yearning for faces they would never see again. Oh, how many he had seen die like that! Intolerable to watch them. And could one do nothing? "Cigarettes. Give them cigarettes," he tried to tell somebody. "And marmalade for breakfast; and phonographs, and then they will enter living into immortality"—No: he did not mean that. What did he mean? He could catch at nothing now. Thoughts were tossed and tumbled like the rubbish of wreckage from an inundated town on the deep currents of his anguish. A current that raced and seethed and carried him away. He saw it. Its breathless speed was like the fever in his blood. If it went faster he would lose his breath. Church-bells ringing on the banks lost theirs as he sped past so swiftly and made a trail of whining sound.—Effie! Effie! It was poor little Effie, drowning. He saw her wild, small face, battling. Bubbles boiled up about his cry.

Suddenly the torrent was stilled. Without commotion, without tumult, it was stilled. There was a dam somewhere; it had stopped racing; he could get his breath. Still and slow; oh! it was delicious to feel that quiet hand on his forehead; his mother's hand, and to know that Effie was safe. He lay with closed eyes and saw a smooth waterfall sliding and curving with green grey depths into the lower currents of the stream. He remembered the stream well, now; one of his beloved French rivers; one of the smaller, sylvan rivers, too small for majesty; with silver poplars spaced against the sky on either bank and a small town, white and pink and pearly-grey, clear on the horizon. Tranquil sails were above him and the bells from the distant church-tower floated to him across the fields. Soundlessly, slowly, he felt himself borne into oblivion.

The black-browed nurse was tending him next morning. "You are better," she said, smiling at him. "You slept all night. No; it's a shame, but you mayn't have water yet." She put the lemon and glycerine to his lips. "The pain is easier, isn't it?"

He said it was. He felt that he must not stir an inch so as to keep it easier, but he could not have stirred had he wanted to, for he was all tightly swathed and bandaged. He remembered something he wanted specially to ask: "Paris? They haven't got it yet?"

"They'll never get it!" she smiled proudly. "Everything is going splendidly."

The English surgeon was such a nice fellow. He had spectacles on a square-tipped nose and a square, chubby face; yet his hair was nearly white. Oldmeadow remembered, as if of days before the flood, that his name was a distinguished one. Perhaps it was morphia they gave him, after his wound was dressed, or perhaps he fainted. The day passed in a hot and broken stupor and at night the tides of fever rose again and carried him away. But, again, before he had lost his breath, before he had quite gone down into delirium, the quiet hand came and sent him, under sails, to sleep.

Next day Oldmeadow knew, from the way the surgeon looked at him, that his case was grave. His face was grim as he bent over the dressing and he hurt horribly. They told him, when it was over, that he had been very brave, and, like a child, he was pleased that they should tell him so. But the pain was worse all day and the sense of the submerging fever imminent, and he lay with closed eyes and longed for the night that brought the hand. Hours, long hours passed before it came. Hours of sunlight when, behind his eyelids, he saw red, and hours of twilight when he saw mauve. Then, for a little while, it was a soft, dense grey he saw, like a bat's wing, and then the small light shone across his bed; he knew that the night had come, and felt, at last, the hand fall softly on his head.

He lay for some time feeling the desired peace flow into him and then, through its satisfaction, another desire pushed up into his consciousness and he remembered that, more than about Paris, he had wanted to speak to the nurse about what she did for him and thank her.

"It's you who make me sleep, isn't it," he said, lying with closed eyes under the soft yet insistent pressure. "I've never thanked you."

She did not reply. She did not want him to talk. But he still wanted to.

"I couldn't thank you last night," he said, "I can't keep hold of my thoughts. And when morning comes I seem to have forgotten everything about the night. You are the nurse who takes care of me in the daytime, too, aren't you?"

Again, for a moment, there was no reply; and then a voice came. "No; I am the night nurse. Go to sleep now."

It was a voice gentle, cold and soft, like snow. It was not an English voice and he had heard it before. Where had he heard it? Rooks were cawing and he saw a blue ribbon rolling, rolling out across a spring-tide landscape. This voice was not like a blue ribbon; it was like snow. Yet, when he turned his head under her hand, he looked round at Adrienne Toner.

The first feeling that came uppermost in the medley that filled him at the sight of her was one of amused vexation. It was as if he went back to his beginnings with her, back to the rooks and the blue ribbon. "At it again!" was what he said to himself, and what he said aloud, absurdly, was: "Oh, come, now!"

She did not lift her hand, but there was trouble on her face as she looked back at him. "I hoped you wouldn't see me, Mr. Oldmeadow," she said.

He was reminded of Bacchus and the laying on of hands; but a classical analogy, even more ridiculous, came to him with her words. "Like Cupid and Psyche," he said. "The other way round. It's I who mustn't look."

The trouble on her face became more marked and he saw that she imagined him to be delirious. He was not quite himself, certainly, or he would not have greeted Adrienne Toner thus, and he made an effort to be more decorous and rational as he said, "I'm very glad to see you again. Safe and sound: you know."

She had always had a singular little face, but it had never looked so singular as now, seen from below with

shadows from the light behind cast so oddly over it. The end of her nose jutted from a blue shadow and her eyes lay in deep hollows of blue. All that he was sure of in her expression was the gravity with which she made up her mind to humour him. “We want you to be safe and sound, too. Please shut your eyes and go to sleep.”

“All right; all right, Psyche,” he murmured, and he knew it wasn’t quite what he intended to say, yet in his flippancy he was taking refuge from something; from the flood of suffering that had broken over him the other night after he had seen that dead face with white roses over its ears. This queer face, half dissolved in blue and yellow, was not dead and the white coiffe came closely down about it. If he obeyed her he knew that she would keep the other faces away and he closed his eyes obediently and lay very still, seeing himself again as the good little boy being praised. This was Psyche; not Ariane. “Ariane ma sœur,” he murmured. It was Ariane who had the white roses—or was it wet ivy? and after her face pressed all the other dying faces. “You’ll keep them away, won’t you?” he murmured, and he heard her say: “Yes; I’ll keep them quite away,” and, softly, a curtain of sleep fell before his eyes crossed by a thin drift of mythological figures.

“I thought it was you who sent me to sleep,” he said to the English nurse next day. He could hardly, in the morning light, believe it was not a dream.

She smiled with an air of vicarious pride. “No indeed. I can’t send people to sleep. It’s our wonderful Mrs. Chadwick. She does a good deal more than put people to sleep. She cures people—oh, I wouldn’t have believed it myself, till I saw it—who are at death’s door. It’s lucky for you and the others that we’ve got her here for a little while.”

“Where’s here?” he asked after a moment.

“Here’s Boulogne. Didn’t you know?”

“I thought I heard the sea sometimes. It’s for cases too bad, then, to be taken home. Get her here from where?”

“From her hospital in the firing-line. Now that we’re advancing at the front everything there is changed and she could come away for a little. Sir Kenneth’s been begging her to come ever since he saw her. He knew she would work marvels here, too.” The nice young nurse was exuberant in her darkness and rosiness with a Jewish streak of fervour in her lips and eyes. “It’s a sort of rest for her,” she added. “She’s been badly wounded once. You can just see the scar, under her cap, on her forehead. And she nearly died of fever out in Salonika. She had a travelling ambulance there before she came to France.”

“It must be very restful for her,” Oldmeadow remarked with a touch of his grim mirth, “if she has to sit up putting all your bad cases to sleep. Why haven’t I heard of her and her hospital?”

“It’s not run in her name. It’s an American hospital—she is American—called after her mother, I believe. The Pearl Ambulance is what it’s called and everybody here knows about it; all of us nurses and doctors, I mean. Her organizing power is as wonderful as her cures; her influence over her staff. They all worship the ground she walks on.”

“Pearl, Pearl Toner,” Oldmeadow was saying to himself. How complete, how perfect it was. And the nurse went on, delighted, evidently, to talk of an idol, and rather as if she were speaking of a special cure they had installed, a sort of Carrel treatment not to be found anywhere else: “Everything’s been different since she came. It’s almost miraculous to see what the mere touch of her hand can do. Matron says she wouldn’t be surprised if it turned out she was a sort of nun and wore a hair shirt under her dress. Whatever she is, it makes one feel better and stronger just to see her and one would do anything for her just to have her smile at one. She has the most heavenly smile.”

It was all very familiar.

“Ah, you haven’t abandoned me after all, though I have found you out,” he said to Adrienne Toner that night.

He was able at last to see her clearly as she came in, so softly that it was like a dream sliding into one’s sleep. She was like a dream in her nurse’s dress which, though so familiar on other women, seemed to isolate and make her strange. Her face was smaller than he had remembered it and had the curious look, docile yet stubborn, that one sees on the faces of dumb-mutes. She might have looked like that had she been deafened by the sound of so many bursting shells and lost the faculty of speech through doing much and saying nothing among scenes of horror. But she spoke to him, after all, as naturally as he spoke to her, saying, though with no touch of his lightness: “You mustn’t talk, you know, if I come to make you sleep. Sir Kenneth wants sleep for you more than anything else.”

“I promise you to be good,” said Oldmeadow. “But I’m really better, aren’t I? and can talk a little first.”

“You are really better. But it will take a long time. A great deal of sleeping.”

“No one knew what had become of you,” said Oldmeadow, and he remembered that he ought to be sorry that Adrienne Toner had not been killed.

She hesitated, and then sat down beside him. He thought that she had been going to ask him something and then checked herself. “I can’t let you talk,” she said, and in her voice he heard the new authority; an authority gained by long submission to discipline.

“Another night, then. We must talk another night,” he murmured, closing his eyes, for he knew that he must not disobey her. All the same it was absurd that Adrienne Toner should be doing this for him; absurd but heavenly to feel her hand fall softly, like a warm, light bird, and brood upon his forehead.

CHAPTER III

They never spoke of Coldbrooks, nor of Barney, nor of Palgrave; not once. Not once during all those nights that she sat beside him and made him sleep.

He had heard from Coldbrooks, of course; letters came often now. And the dark young nurse had written for him since he could not yet write for himself. He had said no word of seeing Adrienne. Nor had he let them know how near to death he had been and, perhaps, still was. He would have liked to have seen Lydia and Nancy if he were to die; but most of all he wanted to be sure of not losing Adrienne. And he knew that were he to tell them, were they to come, Adrienne would go.

She never spoke to him at all, he remembered—as getting stronger with every day, he pieced his memories of these nights together—unless he spoke to her; and she never smiled. And it came upon him one morning after he had read letters that brought so near the world from which she was now shut out, that she had, perhaps, never forgiven him. After all, though he could not see that he had been wrong, she had everything to forgive him and the thought made him restless. That night, for the first time, she volunteered a remark. His temperature had gone up a little. He must be very quiet and go to sleep directly.

"Yes; I know," he said. "It's because of you. Things I want to say. I'm really so much better. We can't go on like this, can we," he said, looking up at her as she sat beside him. "Why, you might slip out of my life any day, and I might never hear of you again."

She sat looking down at him, a little askance, though gentle still, if gentle was the word for her changed face. "That's what I mean to do," she said.

"Oh, but—" Oldmeadow actually, in his alarm and resentment, struggled up on an elbow—"that won't do. I want to see you, really see you, now that I'm myself again. I want to talk with you—now that I can talk coherently. I want to ask you; well, I won't ask it now." She had put out her hand, her small, potent hand, and quietly pressed him back, and down upon his pillow while her face took on its look of almost stern authority. "I'll be good. But promise me you'll not go without telling me. And haven't you questions to ask, too?"

Her face kept its severity, but, as he found this last appeal, her eyes widened, darkened, looked, for a moment, almost frightened.

"I know that Barney is safe," she said. "I have nothing to ask."

"Well; no; I see." He felt that he had been guilty of a blunder and it made him fretful. "For me, then. Not for you. Promise me. I won't be good unless you promise me. You can't go off and leave me like that."

With eyes still dilated, she contemplated this rebellion.

"You must promise me something, then," she said after a moment.

He felt proud, delighted, as if he had gained a victory over her.

"Done. If it's not too hard. What is it?"

"You won't write to anybody. You won't tell anybody that you've seen me. Only Lady Lumley knows that I am here. And she has promised not to tell. Probably, soon, I shall have left France for ever."

"I won't tell. I won't write. I can keep secrets as well as Lady Lumley. She does keep them, you know. So it's a compact."

"Yes. It's a compact. You'll never tell them; and I won't go without letting you know. I promise. Now go to sleep."

She laid her hand on his forehead, but, for a little while, he heard her breathing deeply and quickly and the sense of his blundering stayed with him so that sleep was longer in coming.

All the same he was much better next day. He was able to sit up and had the glory and excitement of a chop for his midday dinner. And when the pleasant hour of tea arrived it was Adrienne herself who came in carrying the little tray.

He had not seen her in daylight before and his first feeling was one of alarm, for, if she were afoot like this, in daylight, must it not mean that she was soon to leave the hospital? He felt shy of her, too, for, altered as she was by night, the day showed her as far more altered. Whether she seemed much older or much younger he could not have said. The coiffe, covering her forehead, and bound under her chin in a way peculiar to her, left only, as it were, the means of expression visible.

She sat down by the window and looked out, glancing round from time to time as he drank his tea and it was she who found the calm little sentences, about the latest news from the front, the crashing of Bulgaria, that carried them on until he had finished. When he had pushed down his tray she turned her chair and faced him, folding her hands together on her white apron, and she said, and he knew that she had come to say it, "What was it you wanted to ask me?"

He had had, while she sat at the window, her profile with the jutting nose, and her face, as it turned upon him now, made him think suddenly of a seagull. Questing, lonely, with vigilant eyes, it seemed to have great spaces before it; to be flying forth into empty spaces and to an unseen goal.

"Are you going away, then?" He had not dared, somehow, to ask her before. He felt now that he could not talk until he knew.

"Not yet," she said. "But I shall be going soon. The hospital is emptying and my nights on duty are very short. I have, really, only you and two others to take care of. That's why I am up so early to-day. And you are so much better that we can have a little talk; if you have anything to ask me."

"It's this, of course," said Oldmeadow. "It seems to me you ought to dislike me. I misunderstood you in many ways. And now I owe you my life. Before we part I want to thank you and to ask you to forgive me."

Her eyes, seen in daylight, were of the colour of distance, of arctic distances. That had always been their colour, though he had never before identified it.

"But there is nothing to thank me for," she said. "I am here to take care of people."

"Even people who misunderstood you. Even people you dislike. I know." He flushed, feeling that he had been duly snubbed. "But though you take care of everyone, anyone may thank you, too, mayn't they?"

"I don't dislike you, Mr. Oldmeadow," she said after a moment. "And you didn't misunderstand me."

"Oh," he murmured, more abashed than before. "I think so. Not, perhaps, what you did; but what you were. I didn't see you as you really were. That's what I mean."

The perplexity, which had grown, even, to amazement, had left her eyes and she was intently looking at him. "There is nothing for you to be sorry for," she said. "Nothing for me to forgive. You were always right."

"Always right? I can't take that, you know," said Oldmeadow, deeply discomposed. "You were blind, of course, and more sure of yourself than any of us can safely afford to be; but I wasn't always right."

"Always. Always," she repeated. "I was blinder than you knew. I was more sure of myself."

He lay looking at her and she looked back at him, but with a look that invited neither argument not protest. It

remained remote and vigilant. She might have been the seagull looking down and noting, as she flew onward, that the small figure on the beach so far below had ceased to be that of an assailant in its attitude. How remote she was, white strange, fleeting creature! How near she had been once! The memory of how near rushed over his mind. He had, despite the delirious visions of her stricken face, hardly thought at all, since really seeing her again, of that last time. Everything had fitted itself on, rather, to his earliest memories of her, tinged all of them, it was true, with a deeper meaning, but not till this moment consciously admitting it. It rushed in now, poignant with the recovered smell of wet, dark ivy, the recovered sound of her stifled sobs as she had stumbled, broken, beside him in the rain. And with the memory came the desire that she should again be near.

"Tell me," he said, "what are you going to do? You said you might be leaving France for ever. Shall you go back to America?"

"I don't think so. Not for a long time," she answered. "There will be things to do over here, out of France, for a great many years I imagine."

He hesitated, then took a roundabout way. "And when I get home, if, owing to you, I ever get there, may I not tell them that you're safe and sound? It would be happier for them to know that, wouldn't it?"

Her vigilance still dwelt upon him as though she suspected in this sudden change of subject some craft of approach, but she answered quietly:

"No; I think it will be happier for them to forget me. They will be told if I die. I have arranged for that."

"They can't very well forget you," said Oldmeadow after a moment. "They must always wonder."

"I know." She glanced away and trouble came into her face. "I know. But as much as possible. You must not make me real again by telling them. You have promised. You care for them. You know what I mean."

"Yes; I've promised. And I see what you mean. But," said Oldmeadow suddenly, and this, of course, was what he had been coming to. "I don't want to forget. I want you to stay real. You must let me know what becomes of you, always, please."

Astonishment, now, effaced her trouble. "You? Why?" she asked.

He smiled a little. "Well, because, if you'll let me say it, I'm fond of you. I feel responsible for you. I've been too deeply in your life, you've been too deeply in mine, for us to disappear from each other. Don't you remember," he said, and he found it with a sense of achievement, ridiculous as it might sound, "how I held the tea-pot for you? That's what I mean. You must let me go on holding it."

But she could feel no amusement. She was pressing her hands tightly together in her lap, her eyes were wide and her astonishment, he seemed to see, almost brought tears to them. "Fond? You?" she said. "Of me? Oh, no, Mr. Oldmeadow, I can't believe that. You are sorry, I know. You are very sorry. But you can't be fond."

"And why not?" said Oldmeadow, and he raised himself on his elbow the more directly to challenge her. "Why shouldn't I be fond of you, pray? You must swallow it, for it's the truth and I've a right to my own feelings, I hope."

She put aside the playfulness in which his grim earnest veiled itself. "Because you saw. Because you know. All about me. From the first."

"Well?" he questioned after a moment, still raised on his elbow but now with the grimness unalloyed. "What of it?"

"You remember what I was. You remember what you saw. You would have saved them from me if you could; and you couldn't. How can you be fond of a person who has ruined all their lives?"

"Upon my soul," said Oldmeadow laughing, his eyes on hers, "you talk as though you'd been a Lucrezia Borgia! What were you worse than an exalted, stubborn, rather conceited girl? Things went wrong, I know, and partly because of me. But it wasn't all your fault, I'll swear it. And if it was, it was your mistake; not your crime."

"Oh, no, no, no," said Adrienne, and the compulsion of his feeling had brought a note of anguish to her voice. "It wasn't that. It was worse than that. Don't forget. Don't think you are fond of me because I can make you sleep. It's always been so; I see it now—the power I've had over people; the horrible power. For power is horrible unless one is good; unless one is using it for goodness."

"Well, so you were," Oldmeadow muttered, falling back on his pillow, her vehemence, her strange passion, almost daunting him. "It's not because you make me go to sleep that I'm fond of you. What utter rubbish!"

"It is! it is!" she repeated. "I've seen it happen too often. It always happens. It binds people to me. It makes them cling to me as if I could give them life. It makes them believe me to be a sort of saint!"

"Well, if you can help them with it? You have helped them. The war's your great chance in that, you'll admit. No one can accuse you of trying to get power over people now."

"Perhaps not. I'm not thinking of what I may be accused of, but of what happens."

"It doesn't happen with me. I was fond of you—well, we won't go back to that. And you did use it for goodness. Power came by the way and you took it. Of course."

"I thought I was using it for goodness. I thought I was good. That was the foundation of everything. We must go back, Mr. Oldmeadow. You don't see as I thought you did. You don't understand. I didn't mean to set myself up above other people. I thought they were good, too. I was happy in my goodness, and when they weren't happy it seemed to me they missed something I had and that it was a mistake that I could set right for them. I'm going back to the very beginning. Long before you ever knew me. Everything fell into my hand. I loved people, or thought I did, and if they didn't love me I thought it their mistake. That was the way it looked to me, for my whole life long, until you came. I couldn't understand at first, when you came. I couldn't see what you thought. I believed that I could make you love me, too, and when I saw, for you made it plain, that you disliked me, it seemed to me worse than mistake. I thought that you must be against goodness; dangerous; the way you pushed me back—back—and showed me always something I had not thought I meant at the bottom of everything I did. I felt that I wanted to turn away from you and to turn people who loved me away from you, lest you should infect them. And all the while, all the while I was trying to escape—the truth that you saw and that I didn't." She stopped for a moment while, sunken on his pillows, Oldmeadow stared at her. Her breath seemed to fail her, and she leaned forward and put her elbows on her knees and bent her forehead on her joined hands. "It came at last. You remember how it came," she said, and the passion of protest had fallen from her voice. She spoke with difficulty. "Partly through you, and, partly, through my failure; I had never failed before. My failure with Barney. My failure to keep him and to get him back. I couldn't believe it at

first. I struggled and struggled. You saw me. Everything turned against me. It was as if the world had changed its shape and colour when I struggled against it. Everything went down. And when I felt I wasn't loved, when I felt myself going down, with all the rest, I became bad. Bad, bad," she repeated, and her voice, heavy with its slow reiteration, was like a clenched hand of penitence beating on a breast: "really bad at last, for I had not known before what I was and the truth was there, staring me in the face. I did dreadful things, then. Mean things; cruel, hateful things, shutting my eyes, stopping my ears, so that I should not see what I was doing. I ran about and crouched and hid—from myself; do you follow my meaning?—from God. And then at last, when I was stripped bare, I had to look at Him."

She raised herself and leaned back in her chair. Her voice had trembled more and more with the intensity of the feeling that upheld her and she put her handkerchief to her lips and pressed it to them, looking across at him. And, sunken on his pillows, Oldmeadow looked back at her, motionless and silent.

Was it sympathy, pity or tenderness that almost overwhelmed him as he gazed at her? He could not have said, though knowing that the unity that was in them both, the share of the eternal that upheld their lives, flowed out from his eyes into hers as he looked and from hers to his. They were near at last; near as it is rarely given to human beings to experience nearness, and the awe of such a partaking was perhaps the ground of all he felt.

"You see," he said, and a long time had passed, "I was mistaken."

She did not answer him. Perhaps she did not understand.

"I never knew you were a person who could come to the truth like that," he said.

Still holding her handkerchief to her lips, she slightly shook her head.

"Even you never thought that I was bad."

"I thought everybody was bad," said Oldmeadow, "until they came to know that goodness doesn't lie in themselves. The reason you angered me so was that you didn't see you were like the rest of us. And only people capable of great goodness can know such an agony of self-recognition."

"No," she repeated. "Everyone is not bad like me. You know that's not true. You know that some people, people you love—are not like that. They need no agony of recognition, for nothing could ever make them mean and cruel."

He thought for a moment. "That's because you expected so much more of yourself; because you'd believed so much more, and were, of course, more wrong. Your crash was so much greater because your spiritual pride was so great. And I thought you were a person a crash would do for; that there'd be nothing left of you if you came a crash. That was my mistake; for see what there is left."

She rose to her feet. His words seemed to press her too far. "You are kind," she said in a hurried voice. "I understand. You are so sorry. I've talked and talked. It's very thoughtless of me. I must go now."

She came and took the tray, but he put his hand on her arm, detaining her. "You'll own you're not bad now? You'll own there's something real for me to be fond of? Wait. I want you to acknowledge it, to accept it—my fondness. Don't try to run away."

She stood above him, holding the tray, while he kept his hold on her arm. "All I need to know," she said, after a moment, and she did not look at him, "is that no one is ever safe—unless they always remember."

"That's it, of course," said Oldmeadow gravely, "and that you must die to live; and you did die. But you live now, really, and life comes through you again. Your gift, you know, of which you were so much afraid just now, lest it had enveigled me. Don't you see it? How can I put it for you? You had a sort of wholeness before. There must be wholeness of a sort if life is to come through; harmony of a sort, and faith. It wasn't an illusion even then. When you were shattered you lost your gift. The light can't shine through shattered things; and that was when you recognized that without God we are a nothingness; a nothingness and a restlessness mingled. You know. There are no words for it, though so many people have found it and tried to say it. I know, too, after a fashion. I've had crashes, too. But now your gift has come back, for you are whole again; built up on an entirely new principle. You see, it's another you I am fond of. You must believe in her, too. You do believe in her. If you didn't you could not have found your gift."

She had stood quite still while he spoke, looking down, not at him but at the little tray between her hands, and he saw that she was near tears. Her voice was scarcely audible as she said: "Thank you." And she made an effort over herself to add: "What you say is true."

"We must talk," said Oldmeadow. He felt extraordinarily happy. "There are so many things I want to ask you about." And he went on, his hand still on her arm, seeing that she struggled not to cry and helping her to recover: "You're not going away for some time, yet, I hope. Please don't. There'll soon be no need of hospitals of this sort, anywhere, will there? and you must manage to stay on here a little longer. I shan't get on if you go. You won't leave me just as you've saved me, will you, Mrs. Barney?"

At the name, over-taxed as she was already, a pitiful colour flooded her face and before his blunder made visible his own blood answered hers, mounting hotly to his forehead. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he murmured, helpless and hating himself, while his hand dropped. She stood over him, holding herself there so as not to hurt him by the aspect of flight. She even, in a moment, forced herself to smile. It was the first smile he had seen on her face. "You've nothing to be sorry for, Mr. Oldmeadow," she said, as she had said before. "You're very kind to me. I wish I could tell you how kind I feel you are." And as she turned away, carrying the tray, she added: "No; I won't go yet."

CHAPTER IV

He did not see her again for two days; and she did not even come at night. But he now kept possession of his new strength and slept without her help. The sense of happiness brooded upon him. He did not remember ever having felt so happy. His life was irradiated and enhanced as if by some supreme experience.

It was already late afternoon when, on the second day, she appeared; but in this month of August his room was still filled with the reflection of the sunlight and the warm colour bathed her as she entered. She wore a blue cloak over her white linen dress and she had perhaps been walking, for there was a slight flush on her cheeks and a look

almost of excitement in her eyes.

She unfastened her cloak and put it aside and then, taking the chair near the window, clasping her hands, as before, in her lap, she said, without preamble and with a peculiar vehemence: “You hear often from Barney, don’t you?”

Oldmeadow felt himself colouring. “Only once, directly. It rather tires him to sit up, you know. But he’s getting on wonderfully and the doctors think he’ll soon be able to walk a little—with a crutch, of course.”

“But you do hear, constantly, from Nancy, don’t you,” said Adrienne, clasping and unclasping her hands but speaking with a steadiness he felt to be rehearsed. “He is at Coldbrooks, I know, and Nancy is with him, and his mother and Mrs. Averil. It all seems almost happy, doesn’t it? as happy as it can be, now, with Palgrave dead and Barney shackled.”

Startled as he was by her directness Oldmeadow managed to meet it.

“Yes; almost happy,” he said. “I was with them before I came out this last time and felt that about them. Poor Mrs. Chadwick is a good deal changed; but even she is reviving.”

“She has had too much to bear,” said Adrienne. “I saw her again, too, at the end, when she came to Palgrave. She can never forgive me. Meg is happy now, but she will never forgive me either. I wrought havoc in their lives, didn’t I?”

“Well, you or fate. I don’t blame you for any of that, you know,” said Oldmeadow.

“I don’t say that I blame myself for it,” said Adrienne. “I may have been right or I may have been wrong. I don’t know. It is not in things like that that I was bad. But what we must face is that I wrought havoc; that if it hadn’t been for me they might all, now, be really happy. Completely happy. If I had not been there Palgrave would not have been so sure of himself. And if I had not been there Nancy and Barney would have married.”

“I don’t know,” said Oldmeadow. “If Barney hadn’t fallen in love with you he might very probably have fallen in love with some one else, not Nancy.”

“Perhaps, not probably,” said Adrienne. “And if he had he would have stayed in love with her, for Barney is a faithful person. And it may have been because I was so completely the wrong person for him that he came to know so quickly that Nancy was completely the right one. What I feel is that anybody but Nancy would always have been, really, wrong. And now that he loves her but is shackled, there’s only one thing more that can be done. I have often thought of it; I needn’t tell you that. But, till now, I could never see my way. It’s you who have shown it to me. In what you said the other day. It’s wonderful the way you come into my life, Mr. Oldmeadow. You made me feel that I had a friend in you; a true, true friend. And I know what a friend Nancy and Barney have. So the way opens. We must set Barney free, Mr. Oldmeadow. He and Nancy must be free to marry. You and I can do it for them and only you and I.”

“What do you mean?” Oldmeadow murmured as, after her words, the silence had grown deep between them. He repeated, using now the name inevitably and forgetting the other day. “What do you mean, Mrs. Barney?”

To-day she did not flush, but to-day there was a reason for her acceptance. It was, he saw in her next words, only as Barney’s wife that she could help him.

“He must divorce me,” she said. “You and I could go away together and he could divorce me. Oh, I know, it’s a dreadful thing to ask of you, his friend. I’ve thought of all that. Wait. Let me finish. I’ve thought of nothing else since the other day. It came to me in the night after you had been so wonderful to me; after that wonderful thing had happened to us. You felt it, too, I know. It was as if we had taken a sacrament together. I’m not a Christian. You know what I mean. We felt the deepest things together, didn’t we. And it’s because of that that I can ask this of you. No one else would understand. No one else would care for me enough, or for him. And then, you could explain it all to him and no one else could do that. You could explain that it had been to set him free. To set *me* free. Because they’d have to think and believe it was for my sake, too, that you did it, wouldn’t they? so as to have it really happy for them; so that it shouldn’t hurt. When it was all over you could go and explain why you had done it. All we have to do, you know, is to stay in a hotel together; I bearing your name. It’s very simple, really.”

He lay staring at her, overwhelmed. The tears had risen to his eyes as her beauty and her absurdity were thus revealed to him, and as she spoke of their sacrament; but amazement blurred all his faculties. He had never in his life been so amazed. And when he began to emerge, to take possession of himself again, it was only of her he could think; not of himself or Nancy and Barney. Only of her and of her beauty and absurdity.

“Dear Mrs. Barney,” he said at last, and he did not know what to say; “it’s you who are wonderful, you alone. I’d do anything, anything for you that I could. Anything but this. Because, truly, this is impossible.”

“Why impossible?” she asked, and her voice was almost stern.

“You can’t smirch yourself like that.” It was only one reason; but it was the first that came to him.

“I?” she stared. “I don’t think it is to be smirched. I shall know why I do it.”

“Other people won’t know. Other people will think you smirched.”

“No one I care for. Everyone I care for will understand.”

“But to the world at large? Your name? Your reputation?” Oldmeadow protested. “Do they mean nothing to you?”

A faintly bitter humour touched her lips. “You’ve always taken the side of the world in all our controversies, haven’t you, Mr. Oldmeadow? and you were probably right and I was probably wrong; but not because of what the world would think. I know I’m right now, and those words: name: reputation—mean nothing to me. The world and I haven’t much to do with each other. A divorced wife can run soup-kitchens and fever hospitals just as well as the most unsmirched woman of the world. I’m not likely to want to be presented at courts, am I? Don’t think of me, please. It’s not a question of me. Only of you. Will you do it?”

“I couldn’t possibly do it,” said Oldmeadow, and he was still hardly taking her monstrous proposal seriously.

“Why not?” she asked, scrutinizing him. “It’s not that you mind about your name and reputation, is it?”

“Not much. Perhaps not much,” said Oldmeadow; “but about theirs. That’s what you don’t see. That it would be impossible for them. You don’t see how unique you are; how unlike other people. Nancy and Barney couldn’t marry on a fake. The only way out,” said Oldmeadow, looking at her with an edge of ironic grimness in his contemplation,

“if one were really to consider it, would be for you to marry me afterwards and for us to disappear.”

She gazed at him and he saw that she weighed the idea. “But you’d be shackled then,” she said, and her thoughts were evidently clear. “It would mean, besides, that you would lose them.”

“As to being shackled,” Oldmeadow, still grimly, met the difficulty, “that’s of no moment. I’m the snuffy, snappy bachelor type, you remember, and I don’t suppose I’d ever have married. As to losing them, I certainly should.”

“We mustn’t think of it then,” said Adrienne. “You and Barney and Nancy mustn’t lose each other.”

“But we should in either way. I could hardly take up my friendship with them again after Barney had divorced you on account of me, even if you and I didn’t marry. It would give the whole thing away, if it were possible for them to meet me again. As I say, they’d feel they had no right to their freedom on such a fake as that.”

“They couldn’t feel really free unless some one had really committed adultery for their sakes?” Again Adrienne smiled with her faint bitterness and he wondered if a man and woman had ever before had a more astonishing conversation. “That seems to me to be asking for a little too much icing on your cake. Of course it couldn’t be a nice, new, snowy wedding-cake; poor Mrs. Chadwick wouldn’t like it at all, nor Mrs. Averil; but it would be the best we could do for them; and I should think that when people love each other and are the right people for each other they’d be thankful for any kind of cake. Even if it were a good deal burned around the edges,” Adrienne finished, her slight bitterness evidently finding satisfaction in the simile.

“But they wouldn’t see it at all like that,” said Oldmeadow, now with unalloyed gravity. “They’d see it as a cake they had stolen; a cake they had no right to. It’s a question of the laws we live under. Not of personal, but of public integrity. They couldn’t profit by a hoodwinked law. It’s that that would spoil things for them. According to the law they’d have no right to their freedom. And, now that I am speaking seriously, it’s that I feel, too. What you are asking of me, my dear friend, is no more nor less than a felony.”

She meditated, unmoved, still almost sternly, turning her eyes from him and leaning her elbow on the window-sill, her head upon her hand. “I see,” she said at last. “For people who mind about the law, I see that it would spoil it. I don’t mind. I think the law’s there to force us to be kind and just to each other if we won’t be by ourselves. If the law gets tied up in such a foolish knot as to say that people may sin to set other people free, but mayn’t pretend to sin, I think we have a right to help it out and to make it do good against its own will. I don’t mind the law; luckily for them. Because I won’t go back from it now. I won’t leave them there, loving each other but never knowing the fullness of love. I won’t give up a thing I feel right because other people feel it wrong. So I must find somebody else.”

Oldmeadow looked at her in a culminated and wholly unpleasant astonishment. “Somebody else? Who could there be?”

“You may well ask,” Adrienne remarked, glancing round at him with a touch of mild asperity. “You are the only completely right person, because only you and I feel enough for them to do it for them. What I must do now is to find some one who would feel enough, just for me, to do it for me. It makes it more unfair for him, doesn’t it. He’ll have only the one friend to help. But on the other hand it will leave them without a scruple. They’d know from the beginning that with you and me it was a fake; but with him it might seem quite probable. Yes; it’s strange; I had a letter from him only yesterday. I shouldn’t have thought of him otherwise. I might have had to give up. But the more I think,” Adrienne meditated intently, her head on her hand, her eyes turned on the prospect outside, “the more I seem to see that Hamilton Prentiss is the only other chance.”

“Hamilton Prentiss?” Oldmeadow echoed faintly.

“You met him once,” said Adrienne, looking round at him again. “But you’ve probably forgotten. At the dinner we gave, Barney and I, in London, so long ago. Tall, fair, distinguished looking. The son of my Californian friend; the one you and Mrs. Aldesey thought so tiresome.”

He felt himself colouring, but he could give little thought to the minor discomfiture, so deeply was his mind engaged with the major one.

“Did we?” he said.

“And you thought I didn’t see it,” said Adrienne. “It made me dreadfully angry with you both, though I didn’t know I was angry; I thought I was only grieved. I behaved spitefully to Mrs. Aldesey that night, you will remember, though I didn’t know I was spiteful. I did know, however, that she was separated from her husband”—again Adrienne looked, calmly, round at him—“and it was a lie I told Barney when I said I didn’t. Sometimes I think that lie was the beginning of everything; that it was when I told it that I began to hide from myself. However—” She passed from the personal theme. “Yes; Hamilton is, I believe, big enough and beautiful and generous enough to do it.”

“Oh, he is, is he?” said Oldmeadow. “And I’m not, I take it. You’re horribly unkind. But I don’t want to talk about myself. What I want to talk about is you. You must drop this preposterous idea of yours. Really you must. You’ve had ideas like it before. Remember Meg; what a mess you made there. I told you then that you were wrong and I tell you you’re wrong now. You must give it up. Do you see? We’re always quarrelling, aren’t we?”

“But I don’t at all know that I was wrong about Meg, Mr. Oldmeadow,” said Adrienne. “And if I was, it was because I didn’t understand her. I do understand myself, and I don’t agree that I’m wrong or that my plan is preposterous. You won’t call it preposterous, I suppose, if it succeeds and makes Barney and Nancy happy. No; I’m not going to drop it. Nothing you could say could make me drop it. As for Hamilton, I don’t set him above you; not in any way. It’s only that you and he have different lights. I know why you can’t do this. You’ve shown me why. And I wouldn’t for anything not have you follow your own light.”

“And you seriously mean,” cried Oldmeadow, “that you’d ask this young fellow—I remember him perfectly and I’m sure he’s capable of any degree of ingenuousness—you’d ask him to go about with you as though he were your husband? Why, for one thing, he’d be sure to fall head over heels in love with you, and where would you be then?”

Adrienne examined him. “But from the point of view of hoodwinking, that would be all to the good, wouldn’t it?” she inquired; “though unfortunate for Hamilton. He won’t, however,” she went on, her dreadful lucidity revealing to him the hopelessness of any protest he might still have found to make. “There’s a very lovely girl out in California he’s devoted to; a young poetess. He’ll have to write to her about it first, of course; Hamilton’s at the front now, you see; and I must write to his mother. She and Carola Brown are very near each other and will talk it out together and I feel sure they will see it as I do. They’ll see it as something big I’m asking them to do for me—to set me free. I’m sure I can count on Gertrude and I’m sure Hamilton can count on Carola. She’s a very rare, strong spirit.”

Oldmeadow, suddenly, was feeling exhausted, and a clutch of hysterical laughter, as she spoke these last words, held his throat for a moment. He laid his head back on his pillow and closed his eyes, while he saw Adrienne and Hamilton Prentiss wandering by the banks of a French river where poplars stood against a silver sky. He knew that he had accepted nothing when he said at last: “Shall we talk about it another time? To-morrow? I mean, don’t take any steps, will you, until we’ve talked. Don’t write to your beautiful, big friend.”

“You always make fun of me a little, don’t you,” said Adrienne tranquilly. She seemed aware of some further deep discomposure in him and willing, though not comprehending it, to meet it with friendly tolerance. “If he is big and beautiful, why shouldn’t I say it? But I won’t write until we’ve talked again. It can’t be, anyway, until the war is over. And I’ve had already to wait for four years.”

CHAPTER V

She might feel that he had cruelly failed her; but when she came at the same hour next day it was evident to him from her demeanour that she imagined him resigned, if not converted, to her alternative plan. She carried a bunch of late roses and said that she had been having a lovely drive with a dear old friend from Denver, who had managed to get to Boulogne to see her.

“Your friends all come from such distant places,” said Oldmeadow with a pretended fretfulness that veiled an indescribable restlessness. “California, Denver, Chicago. They have, all of them, an implacably remote sound, as if they were carrying you, already, off to other planets.”

“Well, it doesn’t take so long, really, to get to any of them,” said Adrienne, placing the roses in a glass of water by his side, a close, funny little bunch, red roses in the middle and white ones all round. She had taken off her cloak and laid a newspaper down on the little table, seating herself, then, in the window and keeping in her hands a pocket-book that, in its flatness and length and the way she held it, reminded him of the little blue and grey fan of the dinner-party where she had told her first lie. His mind was emptied of thought. Only pictures crossed it, pictures of Adrienne and the tall, fair youth with the ingenuous eyes, wandering by the French river; and, again, Adrienne on that night, now as distant as California, when, with her fan and pearl-wreathed hair, she had met his persiflage with her rebuking imperturbability. But under the pictures a sense of violent tension made his breathing shallow. He fixed his eyes on the pocket-book and wondered how she had nursed people with those ineffectual-looking hands.

“Where were you trained for nursing?” he asked her suddenly. “Out here? or in England?”

“In England. In Oxford. Before Palgrave was taken,” said Adrienne. “I gave up my philosophy very soon for that. I worked in a hospital there.”

“And how came you to go out to Salonika? Tell me about it. And about your hospital here,” he went on with a growing sense of keeping something off. “It’s your own hospital I hear, and wonderfully run. Sir Kenneth was talking to me about you this morning.”

“What a fine person he is,” said Adrienne. “Yes, he came to see us and liked the way it was done.” She was pleased, he saw, to tell him anything he chose to ask about. She told him about her hospital and of all its adventures —they had been under fire so often that it had become an everyday event; and about how admirable a staff she had organized—“rare, devoted people”—and about their wounded, their desperately wounded *poilus* and how they came to love them all. He remembered, as she talked, that she was rich; even richer than he had thought, since she could leave a fortune to Palgrave and yet equip hospitals in France and in Salonika. She told him about Salonika, too. It had been a fever hospital there and the misery and suffering had seemed worse than the suffering here in France. Yes; she had caught the fever herself and had nearly died.

She had no gift for the apt or vivid word. Her nature had been revealed to him as barbarous, or sublime, in its unconventionality, yet it expressed itself only in the medium of trite convention. But his time of jibbing at her platitudes was long since passed. He listened, rather, with a tender, if superficial interest, seeing her heroic little figure moving, unconcerned, among pestilences and bombardments. “It’s not only what you tell me,” he said, when she had brought her recital up to date. “I heard so much from Sir Kenneth. You are one of the great people of the war.”

“Am I?” she said. That, too, unfeignedly, left her unconcerned.

“You’ve the gift of leadership. The gift for big things generally.”

She nodded. “I’m only fit for big things.”

“Only? How do you mean?”

“Little ones are more difficult, aren’t they. My feet get tangled in them. To be fit for daily life and all the tangles; that’s the real test, isn’t it? That’s just the kind of thing you see so clearly, Mr. Oldmeadow. Big things and the people who do them are just the kind of things you see through.”

“Oh, but you misunderstood me—or misunderstand,” said Oldmeadow. “Big things are the condition of life; the little things can only be built up on them. One must fight wars and save the world before one can set up one’s tea-tables.” He remembered having thought of something like this at Lydia’s tea-table. “Tea-tables are important, I know, and the things that happen round them. But if one can nurse a ward of typhus patients single-handed one must be forgiven for letting the tea-pot slip. Really I never imagined you capable of all you’ve done.”

“I always thought I was capable of anything,” said Adrienne smiling slightly, her eyes meeting his in a tranquil partaking of the jest, that must be at her expense. “You helped me to find that out about myself—with all the rest. And I was right enough in thinking that I could face things and lead people. But I wasn’t capable of the most important things. I wasn’t capable of being a wise and happy wife. I wasn’t even capable of being truthful in drawing-rooms when other women made me angry. But I can go on battle-fields and found hospitals and tend the sick and dying. Shells and pestilences”—her smile was gone—“if people knew how trivial they are—compared to seeing your husband look at you with hatred.”

She had turned her eyes away as she was thus betrayed into revealing the old bitternesses of her heart and he dropped his to the little pocket-book that now lay still between her hands. The feeling in her voice, the suffering it

revealed to him, with the bitterness, woke an unendurable feeling in himself. He did not clearly see what the test was to which he put himself; but he knew that what he must say to her was the most difficult thing he had ever had to say; and he found it only after the silence had grown long.

"Mrs. Barney—everything has changed, hasn't it; you've changed; I've changed; Barney may have changed. It was only, after all, a moment of miserable misunderstanding between you. He never really knew what you were feeling. He thought you didn't care for him any longer, when, really, you were finding out how much you cared. Don't you think, before you take final decisions, that you ought to see Barney again? Don't you think you ought to give him another chance? I could arrange it all for you, when I got home."

The flood of colour, deep and sick, had mounted to her face, masking it strangely, painfully, to where the white linen cut across her brow and bound her chin. And, almost supplicatingly, since he saw that she could not speak, he murmured: "You can be a wise and happy wife now; and he loved you so dearly."

She did not lift her eyes. She sat there, looking down, tightly holding the pocket-book in her lap.

"Let me tell him, when I get home, that I've seen you again," he supplicated. "Let me arrange a meeting."

Slowly, not lifting her eyes, she shook her head and he heard her, just heard her say: "It's not pride. Don't think that."

"No; no; I know it's not. Good heavens, I couldn't think it that. You feel it's no good. You feel that his heart is occupied. It is. I can't pretend to hide from you that it is. But your place in it was supreme. There would be no unfairness if you took it again. Nancy would be the first person to want you to take it. You know that that is true of Nancy."

"I know. I heard her plead for me," said Adrienne.

The sentence fell, soft and trenchant; and he remembered, in the silence that followed, what she had heard. He drew a long breath, feeling half suffocated. But he had met his test. It was inevitable, he knew it now, that she should say "Barney and I are parted for ever."

Silence dropped again between them. He did not know what was passing behind its curtain and whether bitterness or only grief was in her heart.

He lay, drawing the slow, careful breaths of his recovery, and saw her presently put out her hand and take up her *New York Herald* and unfold it. She looked down the columns unseeingly; but the little feint of interest helped her.

Slowly the colour faded from her face and it was as if the curtain lifted when, laying the paper down, she said, and he knew that she was finding words to comfort him: "Really everything is quite clear before me now. I shall write at once to Hamilton, and to his mother. If he agrees, if they all agree, he and I can go away very soon I think. Afterwards, I shall stay over here. I've quite made up my mind to that. There'll be so much to do; for years and years; for all one's lifetime. Ways will open. When one is big," she smiled the smile at once so gentle and so bitter, "and has plenty of money, ways always do. I'm a *déracinée* creature; I never had any roots, you know; and I can't do better, I'm sure, than to make soil for the uprooted people to grow in again. That's what's most needed now, isn't it? Soil. It's the fundamental things of life, its bare possibilities, that have been so terribly destroyed over here. America has, still, more soil than she can use, and since I'm an American, and a rich one, my best plan is to use America, in my fortune and my person, for Europe. Because I love them both and because they both need each other."

She had quite recovered herself Her face had found again its pale, fawn tints and she was looking at him with her quietest contemplation while he, in silence, lay looking at her.

"It's not about the things I shall do that I'm perplexed, ever," she went on. "But I'm sometimes perplexed about myself. I sometimes wish I were a Roman Catholic. In an order of some kind. Under direction. To put oneself in the hands of a wise director, it must be so peaceful. Like French friends I have; such wise, fine women; so poised and so secure. I often envy them. But that can't be for me."

She must feel in his silence now the quality of some extreme emotion, and that she believed it to be pity was evident to him as she went on, seeking to comfort him; and troubled by his trouble: "You mustn't be sorry. I am not unhappy. I am a happy person. Do you remember that Sunday morning at Coldbrooks, long ago? How I said to Mother—to Mrs. Chadwick—that I had no doubts? You thought me fatuous. I dimly saw that you thought me fatuous. But it's still true of me. I must tell you, so that you shan't think I'm unhappy. I've been, it seems to me, through everything since then. I've had doubts—every doubt: of myself; of life; of all the things I trusted. Doubt at last, when the dreadful darknesses came—Barney's hatred, Palgrave's death—of God. We've never spoken of Palgrave, have we? I was with him, you had heard, and at the very end it was he who helped me rather than I him. He held me up. When he was dying he held me up. He made me promise him that I would not kill myself—for he guessed what I was thinking; he made me promise to go on. And he saved me. The light began to come back to me while I sat beside him after he had died."

She had not looked at him while she spoke, but down at her hands that, trembling, turned and returned the little pocket-book. And controlling her voice as she sought to control the trembling of her hands, she said: "Perhaps it is always like that. When one confesses one's sin and hates it in oneself, even if it is still there, tempting one, the light begins to come back. After that it came more and more. What you call my gift is part of it. Isn't it strange that I should have had that gift when I was so blind? But what you said was true. I had a sort of wholeness then, because I was blind. And now that I see, it's a better wholeness and a safer gift. That is what I wanted to say, really. To explain, so that you shan't be sorry. No one who can find that light can be unhappy. It comes to me now, always, when I need it. I can make it shine in other people—as Palgrave made it shine in me. Love does it. Isn't it wonderful that it should be so? Nothing else is real beside it. Nothing is real without it. And when it happens, when one feels it come through and shine further, it is more, far more, than happiness."

All the while that she had spoken, pale, and with her trembling hands, he had lain looking at her in silence, a silence that was dividing him, as if by a vast chasm, from all his former life.

He and Adrienne stood on one side of this chasm, and, while it seemed to widen with a dizzying rapidity, he saw that on the other stood Barney, Nancy, Coldbrooks, and Lydia—poor Lydia—and that they were being borne away from him for ever. He saw nothing before him but Adrienne; and for how long was he to keep her? That was his supreme risk; but he could not allay it or step back to the further brink. It was his very life that had fallen in two while she had spoken and without the sense of choice; though he dimly saw that, in the restlessness and urgency of

the hours since he had seen her last, the choice had been preparing.

He was taking the only step possible for him to take on the narrow foothold of the present when he said, in a voice so quiet that she might even be unaware of his seeming gross irrelevance, “Do you know, about your plan—for Barney and Nancy—I’ve been thinking it over and I’ve decided that it must be I, not Hamilton.”

CHAPTER VI

Her eyes met his for a long time before he realized that she might find not only irrelevance but even irreverence. She had shown him her very soul and he had answered with this announcement. Of course it had been because of what she told him that he had seen at last his own necessity; but he could not tell her that.

“I’m not sorry for you,” he said. “I envy you. You are one of the few really happy people in the world.”

“But I’d quite given that idea up, Mr. Oldmeadow,” she said. “What has made you change?”

He saw the trouble in her face, the suspicion of her power and its compulsion over the lives of others. He took the bull by the horns.

“You, of course. I can’t pretend that it’s anything else. I want to do it for you and with you.”

“But it’s for Barney and Nancy that it’s to be done,” she said, and her gravity had deepened. “It’s just the same for them—and you explained yesterday that it would spoil it for them.”

“It may spoil it somewhat,” said Oldmeadow, contemplating her with a curious tranquillity; she was now all that was left him in life to contemplate; and she was all he needed. “But it won’t prevent it. I still think it a wrong thing to do. I still think it a felony. But, since I can’t turn you from it, what I’ve come to see is that it’s, as you said, for you and me, who care for them, to do. It’s not right, not decent or becoming, that anyone who doesn’t even know them should be asked to do such a thing.”

“But Hamilton wouldn’t do it for them,” she said. “It would be for me he would do it. And he wouldn’t think it a felony.”

“All the more reason that his innocence shouldn’t be taken advantage of. I can’t stand by and see it done. It’s for my friends the felony will be committed and it’s I who will bear the burden for them. As to his doing it for you, I know you better than he possibly can know you, and care for you more than he possibly can. If you’re determined on committing a crime, I’ll share the responsibility with you.”

“I know you care more. You are a wonderful friend. You are my best friend in the world.” She gazed at him and he saw that for once he had troubled and perplexed her. “And it’s wonderful of you to say you’ll do it. But Hamilton won’t feel it a burden; not as you will; and for him to do it won’t spoil it for them. If you do it, it will spoil it for them. You said so. And how can I let you do a thing you feel so wrong for my sake?”

“You’ll have to. I won’t have Hamilton sacrificed in order that their cake shall have no burnt edges. They’ll have to pay something for it in social and moral discomfort. It would be nothing to the discomfort of Miss Brown, would it? I shall be able to put it clearly to Barney when I write and tell him that it’s for your sake as well as his and that he and Nancy, who have never sought anything or hoped for anything, are in no way involved by our misdemeanour. I won’t emphasize to Barney what I feel about that side of it. He’s pretty ingenuous, too. It will be a less tidy happiness they’ll have to put up with. That’s all it comes to, as far as they are concerned.”

She was looking at him with the trouble and perplexity and she said:

“They’ll have to pay in far more than social and moral discomfort.”

“Well? In what way? How?” he challenged her.

“You said they’d lose you.”

“Only, if you married me,” he reminded her.

But she remembered more accurately. “No. They’d lose you anyway. You said so. You said that if they could ever see you again it would make it too blatantly a fake. And it’s true. I see it now. How could you turn up quietly, as if nothing had happened, after Barney had divorced me with you as co-respondent? There’s Lady Cockerell,” said Adrienne, and, though she was so grave, so troubled, it was with a touch of mild malice. “There’s Mr. Bodman and Johnson, to say nothing of Mrs. Chadwick and Nancy’s mother. No, I really don’t see you facing them all at Coldbrooks after we’d come out in the ‘Daily Mail’ with head-lines and pictures.”

Her lucidity could indeed disconcert him when it sharpened itself like this with the apt use of his vocabulary. He had to stop to think.

“There won’t, at all events, be pictures,” he paused by the triviality to remark. “We shan’t appear. It will be an hotel over here and the case will be undefended. We needn’t, really, consider all that too closely. At the worst, if they do lose me, it’s not a devastating loss. They’ll have each other.”

“Ah, but who will you have?” Adrienne inquired. “Hamilton will have Carola and they will have each other. But who will you have?”

He lay and looked at her. There was only one answer to that question and he could not make it. He was aware of the insufficiency of his substitute. “I’d have your friendship,” he said.

“You have that now,” said Adrienne. “And though I’m so your friend, I’ll be leaving you, soon, probably for ever. We’ll probably never meet again, Mr. Oldmeadow. Our paths lie so apart, don’t they? My friendship will do you very little good.”

Her words cut into him, but he kept a brave countenance. “I’d have the joy of knowing I’d done something worth while for you. How easily I might have died here, if it hadn’t been for you. My life is yours in a sense and I want you to use it rather than Hamilton’s. I have my work, you know; lots of things I’m interested in to go back to some day. As you remarked, a divorced wife can run soup-kitchens and in the same way a co-respondent can write articles and go to concerts.”

“I know. I know what a fine, big life you have,” she murmured, and the trouble on her face had deepened. “But

how can I take it from you? A felony? How can I let you do, for my sake, something you feel to be so wrong?"

"Give it up then," said Oldmeadow. And if he had found it difficult to make his plea for Barney a little while before, how much more difficult he found it to say this, and to mean it, now. "Give it up. That's your choice, and your only choice. You owe that to me. Indeed you do. To give it up or to accept me as your companion in iniquity. I'm not going to pretend I don't think it iniquity to give you ease. You're not a person who needs ease. And I can do without it, too. For your sake. So there you have it."

"Not quite. Not quite," she really almost pleaded. "I couldn't ask it of Hamilton if he felt about it in the least little way as you do. And Carola doesn't care a bit about the law either. She's an Imagist, you know."—Adrienne offered this fact as if it would help to elucidate Carola's complaisances. "She's written some very original poetry. If it were Hamilton no one would lose anything, and Barney and Nancy would be free. Indeed, indeed I can't give it up when it's all there, before me, with everything to gain and nothing to lose for anybody, if it's Hamilton."

"Then it must be me, you see," said Oldmeadow. "And I shan't talk to you about the iniquity again, I promise you. I've made my protest and civilization must get on as best it can. You're a terrible person, you know"—he smiled a little at her, finding the banter so that she should not guess at the commotion of his heart. "But I like you just as you are. Now where shall we go?"

CHAPTER VII

He could not have believed that it would be so delicious to live with Adrienne Toner.

Even at the moment when he had known that he loved her, he had been, though filled with the sense of a present heaven, as aware as ever of the discrepancies between them, and during the three months that separated them, he at Cannes, she nursing in Paris, he knew many doubts; never of his love, but of what it was making him do and of where it was going to lead them. He couldn't for the life of him imagine what was to become of them if his hopes were fulfilled, for he hardly saw himself following her off to Central Europe—it was to Serbia, her letters informed him, that her thoughts were turning—nor saw them established in London under the astonished gaze of Lydia Aldesey.

She had selected Lyons as their place of meeting, because of the work for the *rapatriés* that she wished to inspect there, and from the moment that he saw her descend from the Paris express, dressed in dark civilian clothes and carrying, with such an air of competence, her rug and dressing-case, all doubts were allayed and all restlessness dispelled.

He had arrived the day before and had found an old-fashioned hotel with spacious rooms overlooking the Saône, and, as they drove to it on that November evening, she expressed herself, scrutinizing him with a professional eye, as dissatisfied with his recovery.

It was because of the restlessness, of course, that he had not got as well as he should have, and he knew that he must, in the stress of feeling that now beset him, look strangely, and he promised her, feeling that he spoke the truth, that now that he had his nurse again complete recovery would be only a matter of days.

"I want you to see our view," he said to her when the porter had carried up her little box and they were left alone in the brocaded and gilded salon that separated their rooms; "I chose this place for the view; it's the loveliest in Lyons, I think."

There was still a little twilight, and standing at the window they looked down at the lighted quai with its double row of lofty plane-trees and across the jade-green Saône at St. Jean, the grey cathedral, and at the beautiful white *archevêché* glimmering in a soft, dimmed atmosphere that made him think of London.

"There's a horrible modern cathedral up on the hill," he said; "but we don't need to see it. We need only see the river and the *archevêché* and St. Jean. And in the mornings there's a market below, a mile of it, all under huge mushroom-coloured umbrellas; flowers and cheeses and every kind of country produce. I think you'll like it here."

"I like it very much. I think it's beautiful," said Adrienne. "I like our room, too," and she turned and looked up at the painted ceiling and round at the consoles and mirrors, inlaid tables and richly curved, brocaded chairs. "Isn't it splendid."

"Madame Récamier is said to have lived here," Oldmeadow told her. "And this is said to have been her room."

"And now it's mine," said Adrienne, smiling slightly as though she found the juxtaposition amusing.

Already the stealing sense of deliciousness was breathing over him. The very way in which she said, "our room," was part of it. Even the way in which she said that made him feel the peace, comfort, and charm of a shared life as he had never before felt it. And the sense grew and grew on that first evening.

It was delicious to hear the waiters address her as Madame, and to know that it was his madame they imagined her to be, when he sat opposite to her at their little table in the dining-room. She wore a grey dress now and, with her quiet, her calm glances cast about her, might indeed have been the veritable Madame Oldmeadow inscribed at the *bureau*. If they had the aspect of a devoted, long-mated couple, it was because of her calm. But she would have been as unperturbed, he felt sure, had she been stopping there under her own name instead of his and looked upon as his well-established mistress. Situations would never embarrass her as long as she knew what she was doing with them. That night when she gave him her hand at bedtime she said, looking at him with the affectionate, professional eyes: "I'll come and put you to sleep if you need me; be sure to let me know."

But he had no need to call her. He slept as soundly as though she sat beside him with her hand upon his brow.

So the mirage of conjugal felicity was evoked about him.

She poured out his coffee for him in the morning wearing a silk *négligé* edged with fur, and said, as they buttered their rolls, that they must buy some honey for their breakfasts. She said, too, that they must do a great deal of sight-seeing in the afternoons. "There is so much to be seen in Lyons. And I shall finish with my *rapatrié* work in the mornings." He asked if he might not come with her to the *rapatrié* work, but was told that he was not yet strong enough for more than one walk in the day. "In our evenings, after tea," she went on, "I thought perhaps you'd like to

study Dante a little with me. My Dante is getting so rusty and I've brought a very fine edition. Are you good at Italian?"

He said he wasn't, but would love to read Dante with her.

"And we must get a piano," she finished, "and have music after dinner. It will be a wonderful holiday for me."

So the days fell at once into a series of rituals. He saw that she had always mapped them out conscientiously, as Mrs. Toner had doubtlessly taught her to do, careful of the treasure of time—as Mrs. Toner would have said—entrusted to each soul by life. So, no doubt, Adrienne would put it still. And what he would, in first knowing her, have found part of her absurdity, he found now part of her charm.

That was what it all came back to. He saw, reconstructing their past, that from the beginning she had had her deep charm for him.

It was the trivial word for the great fact; the compulsion of personality; the overflow of vitality; the secret at once of the saint and of the successful music-hall singer. Her own absorption in life was so intense that it communicated itself. Her confidence was so secure that it begot confidence. Her power was implicit in all she did. It was not only the *rapatriés* she dealt with, as, at the first, she had dealt with the wounded. She dealt as successfully and as accurately with the little things of life. Honey was on their breakfast-table; flowers on the consoles; music on the piano. The gilded hotel salon became a home.

She was still, in demeanour, the cultured, travelled American, equipped always, for their walks, with a guide-book or history, from which she often read to him as they paused to lean on the parapets of the splendid quais. There were few salient facts in the history of the potent city that were not imparted to him; and with anyone else what a bore it would have been to have to listen! But he was more than content that she should tell him about the Romans or Richelieu. It was everything to him to feel that they shared it all, from the honey to Richelieu.

And with all the intimacy went the extreme reserve.

She had showed him, when it was necessary for their understanding as friends, the centre of her life; yet she remained, while so gentle, so absorbed, and even loving, as remote, as inaccessible, as he had felt her to be on those first days in the hospital. She never referred to her own personal situation not to any emotion connected with it. She never referred to herself or expressed a taste or an opinion touched with personal ardour. He did not know what she was really feeling, ever. Though, when he looked at her, sitting opposite him in her grey and addressed by the assiduities of the waiters, he could imagine that he was living with a wife, he could imagine more often that he was living with a nun. Her control and her selflessness were cloistral. He could not think her in any need of a director.

They walked one afternoon along the Quai des Brotteaux, returning from the park of the Tête d'Or, where they had wandered on the gravel under the tall, melancholy trees and fed the deer. The ugly yet magnificent city was spread before them in one of its most splendid aspects, climbing steeply, on the further banks of the Rhône, to the cliff-like heights of the Croix Rousse and marching, as it followed the grandiose curve of the river, into a sunset sky where the cupola of the Hospice hung like a dark bubble against the gold and the Alps, not visible from the river level, seemed yet to manifest themselves in the illumined clouds ranged high above the horizon.

Ten days of their appointed fortnight had now passed and while Oldmeadow kept a half unseeing yet appraising eye upon the turbulent glories of the river, he was wondering when and how he should make his revelation and his appeal. If her reserve made it more difficult to imagine, her intimacy did not make it more easy. It was because she was so intimate that she had remained so unaware. For all his self-command he felt sure that in any other circumstances she could not, for these ten days, have remained so blind.

Here she walked beside him, the Madame Oldmeadow of the hotel, looking before her as she walked and thinking, he would have wagered, not of him but of Serbia.

She wore a beautifully adjusted little costume, conveying in its sober darkness the impression of richness and simplicity that her clothes had always given him. Fur was turned up about her ears and a small hat of fur and velvet was turned down over her eyes as she had always worn her hats. The straight fringe of gold showed under its brim and under the gold were those calm, those questing, melancholy eyes.

Or perhaps—he carried further his rueful reverie—she was thinking about the date of the Hospice. He had the guide-book in his pocket.

"Isn't it jolly?" he suggested, as she looked up at him, indicating the prospect spread before them and adding, since he knew that his English instinct for boyish understatement still puzzled her: "Like a great, grim queen in shabby clothes; raised on such a throne and crowned with such jewels that one feels her glorious rather than ugly."

Adrienne studied the shabby queen attentively and then looked back at him. Perhaps something dwelling in his eyes, something for her only and not at all for Lyons, caught her more special attention, for she said suddenly, and so unexpectedly that, with a sort of terror, he felt that his crisis might be coming: "You've been very dear to me, Mr. Oldmeadow, in all our time here. I feel it to have been a great privilege, you know; a great opportunity."

"Really? In what way?" He could at all events keep his voice quiet and light. "I thought it had been you who made all the opportunities."

"Oh, no. I never make any of the opportunities I am thinking of," said Adrienne. "I only know how to take them. It isn't only that you are more widely and deeply cultured than I am—though your Italian accent isn't good!"—she smiled; "but I always feel that you see far more in everything than I do, even when you seem to be seeing less. I have to go carefully and pick up fact by fact, while you see things in a sort of vision and they are all related as they enter your mind. That's where my privilege comes in. You make me share your vision sometimes. You have the artistic mind, and I am not really artistic at all—though Mother always wanted that for me more than anything; with all that goes with it."

She was speaking of herself—though it was only in order to express more exactly her gratitude, and, as he walked beside her, he was filled with the mingled hope and terror. After all he had still four more days of her. It would be terrible to spoil them.

"No; you aren't artistic," he agreed. "And I don't know that I am, either. Whether I am or not, I feel mine to have been the opportunity and the privilege."

"I can't understand that at all," she said, with her patent candour.

"It may be part of the artistic temperament to feel things one can't understand. Though I do understand why I

feel it," he added.

"And it's part of the artistic temperament not to try"—Adrienne turned their theme to its more impersonal aspect. "Never to try to enjoy anything that you don't enjoy naturally. I don't believe I ever enjoy any of the artistic things quite naturally. I've always been trained to enjoy and I've always tried to enjoy; because I thought it was right to try. But since I've been here with you I've come to feel that what I've enjoyed has been my own effort and my mastery of the mere study, and I seem to feel that it might be as well to give up trying and training and fall back on the things that come naturally; scenery artists would think sentimental, and babies; and patriotic songs." She smiled a little as she found her list. But she was grave, too, thinking it out and adding another to her discovered futilities.

"It may be as well to limit your attention to the sentimental scenery and the babies, since you've so many other things to do with it," he acquiesced. "We come back to big people again, you see; they haven't time to be artistic; don't need to be."

"Ah, but it's not a question of time at all," said Adrienne, and he remembered that long ago, from the very first, he had said that she wasn't stupid. "It's a question of how you're born. That's a thing I would never have admitted in my old days, you know. I would never have admitted that any human soul was really shut out from anything. Perhaps we're not, any of us, if we are to have all eternity to grow in. But as far as this life is concerned I see quite clearly now that some people are shut out from all sorts of things, and that the sort of mistake I made in my old time was in thinking that anyone who had the will could force eternity into any given fragment of our temporal life. I did do a little philosophy, you see! That's what I mean and you understand, I know. All the same I wish I weren't one of the shut-out people. I wish I were artistic. I'd have liked to have that side of life to meet people with. I sometimes think that one doesn't get far with people, really, if all that one has to give are the fundamental things like the care of their minds and bodies. One goes deep, of course; but one doesn't go far. You can do something for them; but there's nothing, afterwards, that they can do *with* you; and it makes it rather lonely in a way—when one has time to be lonely."

He did not know, indeed, whether she saw the beauty of the scene spread before them as they walked, and he was remembering, with a sort of tranced tenderness, the flower-wreathed shepherdess and her crook; and Mrs. Toner with her lilies and seagulls. But why should she see beauty when she made it? It was all that he could see in her now.

"What you can do for them afterwards is to pour out their coffee for them in the most enhancing way," he suggested, "and make sight-seeing a pleasure, and arrange flowers and place chairs and tables so that a hotel salon becomes loveable. If you find the person to whom you can give the fundamental things and do all sorts of homely things with afterwards, why be lonely? We are very happy together, aren't we? We get a great deal out of each other. I can speak for myself, at all events; and you've just told me that I give something, too. So why should you go off to Central Europe next week? Why not go back with me to the South," he finished, "and wander about together enjoying, quite naturally, the sentimental scenery?"

He held his breath after he had thus spoken, wondering with intensity, while he felt his heartbeats, what she would make of it. He knew what he could make of it, seizing his opportunity on the instant, if only she would recognize the meaning that underlay the easy words. And framed in the little hat on the background of transfigured Lyons, Adrienne's face was turned towards him and, after he had made his suggestion, she studied him in silence for what seemed to him a long lapse of time. Then she said, overwhelmingly:

"That's perfectly lovely of you, Mr. Oldmeadow."

"Not at all; not perfectly lovely at all," he stammered as he contradicted her and he heard that his voice sounded angry. "It's what I want. I want it very much."

"Yes. I know you do. And that's what's so lovely," said Adrienne. "I know you want it. You are sorry for me all the time. And you want to cheer me up. Because you feel I've lost so much. But, you know; you remember; I told you the truth that time. I don't need cheering. I'm not unhappy. One can be lonely without being unhappy."

"I'm not sorry for you," poor Oldmeadow rejoined, still in the angry voice. "I'm not thinking of you at all. I'm thinking of myself. I'm lonely, too, and I am unhappy, even if you aren't."

She stopped short in her walk. He saw in her eyes the swift, almost diagnosing solicitude that measured his need and her own capacity. It was as though his temperature had gone up alarmingly.

"Dear Mr. Oldmeadow," she said; and then she faltered; she paused. She no longer found her remedies easily. "It's because you are separated from your own life," she did find. "It's because all this is so bitter to you; what you are doing now—how could I not understand?—and the war, that has torn us all. But when it's over, when you can go home again and take up your own big life-work and find your own roots, happiness will come back; I'm sure of it. We are all unhappy sometimes, aren't we? We must be; with our minds and hearts. Our troubled minds; our lonely hearts. But you know as well as I do, dear Mr. Oldmeadow, that our souls can find the way out."

Her nature expressed itself in platitudes; yet sometimes she had phrases, rising from her heart as if from a fountain fed by unseen altitudes, that shook him in their very wording. "Our troubled minds. Our lonely hearts," echoed in his ears while, bending his head downwards, he muttered stubbornly: "My soul can't, without you."

She still stood, not moving forward, her eyes raised to his. "Please don't say that," she murmured, and he heard the trouble in her voice. "It can't be so, except for this time that you are away from everybody. You have so many things to live for. So many people near you. You are such a big, rare person. It's what I was afraid of, you know. It happens so often with me; that people feel that. But you can't really need me any longer."

He said nothing, still not raising his eyes to hers, and she went on after a moment. "And I have so many things to live for, too. You've never really thought about that side of my life, I know. Why should you? You think of any woman's life—isn't it true?—as not seriously important except on its domestic side. And you know how important I think that. But it isn't so with me, you see. I have no hearth and I have no home; I have only my big, big life and it's more important than you could believe unless you could see it all. When I'm in it it takes all my mind and all my strength and I'm bound to it, yes, just as finally, just as irrevocably as a wife who loves is bound by her marriage vows; because I love it. Do you see? They are waiting for me now. They need me now. There are starving people, dying people; and confusion; terrible confusion. I have a gift for all that. I can deal with it. Those are just the things I can deal with. And I mustn't put it off any longer—when our time is up. I must leave you, my dear, dear friend, however much I'd love to stay."

She was speaking at last with ardour, and about herself. And what she said was true. He had never thought about her work except in the sense that he thought her a saint and knew that saints did good deeds. That she was needed, sorely needed, by the starving and dying, was a fact, now that it was put before him, silencing and even shaming him. It gave him, too, a new fear. If she had her blindness, he had his. His hopes and fears, after all, were all that he had to think of; she had the destinies of thousands. He remembered Sir Kenneth's tone in speaking of her; its deep respect. Not the respect of the man for the tender-hearted, merciful woman; but the respect of a professional expert for another expert; respect for the proved organizer and leader of men.

"I have been stupid," he said after a moment. "It's true that I've been thinking about you solely in relation to myself. Would you really love to stay? If it wasn't for your work? It would be some comfort to believe that."

"Of course I'd love to stay," she said, eagerly scanning his face. "I'd love to travel with you—to pour out your coffee in Avignon, Nîmes, Cannes—anywhere you liked. I'd love our happy time here to go on and on. If life could be like that; if I didn't want other things more. You remember how Blake saw it all:

'He who bends to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy.'

I mustn't try to bend and keep this lovely time. I must let it fly—and bless it as it goes. And so it will bless me."

She seldom made quotations nowadays. For this one he felt a gratitude such as his life had rarely known.

"It's been a joy to you, too, then?"

"Of course it has," said Adrienne smiling at him and turning at last towards the bridge that they must cross. "It's been one of the most beautiful things that has ever happened to me."

CHAPTER VIII

Oldmeadow sat at the inlaid table in the gilded salon on the afternoon of the last day. He had two letters to write, for, as he had put off speaking to Adrienne till their last evening, so he had put off writing to Barney and to Lydia Aldesey till this last afternoon, and he saw now how difficult it would be to write coherently while his thoughts stretched themselves forward to those few hours of the night when his fate would be decided.

Adrienne had gone out. She had written her short communication to Barney and brought it in with its envelope and laid it before him, asking him in the voice that, again, made him think of snow: "Is that quite right?"

It was, quite, he told her, after glancing through it swiftly. It stated, in the most colourless terms, the facts that Barney was to take to his solicitor. "Quite right," he repeated, looking up at her. "Are you going out? Will you post it?—or shall I?"

"Will you post it with yours? Yes. I must go out. But I'll try to be back by tea-time. It's very disappointing; our last afternoon. But that poor woman from Roubaix—the one with consumption up at the Croix Rousse—is dying. They've sent for me. All the little children, you remember I told you. I'm going to wire to Joséphine and ask her if she can come down and look after them for a little while."

"Joséphine?" he questioned. He had, till now, entirely forgotten Joséphine. Adrienne told him that she was with her parents in a provincial town. "They lost their only son and are very sad. Fine, brave old people. He is a baker, the old father, and makes the most wonderful bread. I went to see them last summer."

Their packing was done and the room denuded; the men had taken away the piano that morning. He had his letters to write; so there was really no reason why she should not go. And there was, besides, nothing that they had to say to each other, except the one thing he had to say.

The silence that overtakes parting friends on a station platform had overtaken them since the morning, though, at lunch, Adrienne had talked with some persistence of her immediate plans and prospects and about the unit of doctors and nurses who were to meet her in Italy. There was no reason why she should not go, and he would even rather she did. He would rather see no more of her until evening when everything but the one thing would be over and done with. And so he was left with his letters, leaning his elbows on the table over the hotel paper and staring out at the Saône and the white *archevêché*.

Both letters were difficult to write; but beside the one to Lydia, the one to Barney was easy. Barney, after all, was to gain everything from what he had to tell him, and Lydia was to lose; how much was Lydia to lose? He recalled their last evening together and its revelations and saw that the old laughing presage was now more than fulfilled. Lydia was to lose more than her toes and fingers; in any case. Even if he returned to her alone, she cared for him too much not to feel, always, the shadow of his crippled heart; his heart not only crippled, but occupied, so occupied that friendships, however near, became, in a sense, irrelevancies. And if he returned with Adrienne—but could he return with Adrienne? What kind of a life could he and Adrienne lead in London?—even if Lydia's door, generously, was opened to them, as he believed it would be—knowing her generous.

He laid down his pen and fixed his eyes on the river and he tried to see Lydia and Adrienne together. But it was a useless effort. From this strange haven of the Lyons hotel where he had spent the happiest fortnight of his life, he could not see himself into any future with familiar features. He could only see himself and Adrienne, alone, at hotels. To attempt to place her in Lydia's generous drawing-room was to measure more accurately than he had yet measured it the abyss that separated him from his former life. If it could be spanned; if Adrienne could be placed there, on the background of eighteenth-century fans and old glass, she became a clipped and tethered seagull in a garden, awkward, irrelevant, melancholy. Lydia might cease to find her third-rate and absurd; but she wouldn't know what to do with her any more than she would have known what to do with the seagull. So what, if Adrienne became his wife, remained of his friendship with Lydia?

He put aside the unresolved perplexity and took Barney first.

"My dear Barney," he wrote,—"I don't think that the letter Adrienne has written to you will surprise you as much as this letter of mine. You will understand from hers that she wishes to free herself and to free you. You will

understand that that is my wish, too. She only tells you that she has been staying here with me, for a fortnight, as my wife; that's for your solicitor; you will read between the lines and know that it seemed worth while to both of us to make the necessary sacrifice in order to gain so much for you and for her. I hope that you and my dear Nancy will feel that we are justified, and that you will take your happiness as bravely as we secure it for you. You'll know that our step hasn't been taken lightly.

"But, now, dear Barney, comes my absolutely personal contribution. It is a contribution, for it will make you and Nancy happier to know that I have as much to gain as you and she. I have fallen in love with Adrienne and I hope that I may win her consent to be my wife. Yes, dear Barney, unbelievable as it will look to you, there it is; and she dreams of it as little as you could have dreamed of it. I met her again, as her letter informs you, at the Boulogne hospital. She asked me to say nothing about our meeting. She wanted to disappear out of your lives. She saved my life, I think, and I saw a great deal of her. What I found in her that I had not seen before I need not say.

"My great difficulty, my burden and perplexity now, lie in the fact that she has no trace of feeling for me that might give me hope. We became, at Boulogne, the best of friends; such friends that this plan suggested itself to her; and we remain, after our fortnight here, the best of friends; and that is all. Yet I have hope, unjustified and groundless though it may be, and had I not had it from the beginning I couldn't have entered upon the enterprise; not even for you and Nancy. From one point of view it's possible that you may feel that I've entered upon it in spite of you and Nancy. You may feel inclined to repudiate and disown the whole affair and to remain unaware of it. In that case it would come down to an appeal from me to you to carry it through for my sake. But from another point of view it makes it easier for you; easier for you to accept, since my hope gives integrity to the situation. That's another thing that decided me. If it had been mere sham I don't think I could have undertaken it. Adrienne felt none of my scruples on this score. She walked over legal and conventional commandments like a saint over hot ploughshares. But I haven't her immunities. I should have felt myself badly scorched, and felt that I'd scorched you and Nancy, if my hope hadn't given everything its character of *bona fides*.

"Dear Barney, dear Nancy, please forgive me if I've been selfish. It hasn't all been selfishness, that I promise you; it was in hopes for you, too; and I have to face sacrifices. The worst of them will be that if Adrienne takes me I'll have to lose you. You can measure the depth of my feeling for her from the fact that I can make such sacrifices. Perhaps you'll feel that even if she doesn't take me I'll have to lose you. I hope not. I hope, in that case, that mitigations and refuges will be found for me and that some day you'll perhaps be able to make a corner in your lives where I may creep and feel my wounds less aching. In any case, after Adrienne, you are the creatures dearest to me in the world and I am always and for ever your devoted friend,

ROGER."

And now Lydia. There was no use in thinking about it. The plunge must be taken.

"My dear Lydia," he wrote,—"I have fallen in love with Adrienne Toner. I feel that with such a friend as you it's better to begin with the bomb-shell. She doesn't know it, and if we are here in this Lyons hotel together, it's only, she imagines, because she wishes to set Barney free and that I've undertaken, for her sake and for Barney's, a repugnant task. It is a repugnant task, in spite of what it may mean to me of happiness. I hate it for her, and for Barney and for myself. But since she was determined on it and since, if it wasn't I it was to be another friend, and since I have fallen in love with her, I saw that it was only decent that the co-respondent in the case should be the man who married her afterwards. For I hope to become her husband, and I haven't one jot of ground for my hope. We are studying Dante together, and she shows me the sights of Lyons. She is just the same. Yet completely altered.

"I don't know whether you'll feel you can ever see me again, with or without her. I don't want to cast myself too heavily on your compassion, so I'll only remind you that even if I return to England alone I shall probably have to lose Nancy and Barney and that you will be my only refuge. It will be the culmination of my misfortunes if I have to lose you.

"Dear Lydia, I am always your devoted

"ROGER"

But he hadn't lost her. He knew he hadn't lost her; in any case. And the taste of what he did was sharp and bitter to him, for she was generous and loyal and he had cut off her very limbs. When he had addressed and stamped the letters he went downstairs, and, for the sense of greater finality, carried them to the post instead of dropping them into the hotel-box.

He had almost the sense of disembodiment as he returned to the empty and dismantled room. He seemed to have become a mere consciousness suspended between two states of being. The past was gone. He had dropped it into the post-box. And he saw no future. He felt, for the moment, no hopes. At the moment it seemed absurd to think that Adrienne could ever love him. He tried to picture Coldbrooks and Somer's Place when the bomb-shell struck them. Would Barney show Nancy the letter? Nancy would be pale, aghast, silent. Barney would have to wait for days, perhaps, before saying to her: "But, after all, it's for their sakes, too, Nancy dear. See what Roger says." Mrs. Averil would cast up her hands and cry "That woman!"—but, perhaps, with as much admiration as repudiation, and Meg, if she were summoned to the scene of confusion, would say, "So she's got hold of Roger, too." Funnily enough it was the dear March Hare, he felt sure, who would be the first one to stretch out a hand towards the tarnished freedom. "After all, you know," he could hear her murmuring, "it would be much *nicer* for Barney and Nancy to be married, wouldn't it? And Adrienne wasn't a Christian, you know, so probably the first marriage doesn't *really* count. We mustn't be conventional, Monica." Yes, perhaps it would go like that at Coldbrooks. But at Somer's Place Lydia would sit among her fans and glass and wish that they had never seen Adrienne Toner.

He paced up and down before the windows and he had never been so lonely in his life. He was so lonely that he became aware at last that his mere negative state was passing into a positive and that grief at the severance of old ties had become fear of losing Adrienne. The fear and the loneliness seemed actualized when, at five, the waiter appeared bearing the tea-tray on his shoulder. He had never had tea alone before in this strange, foreign room. Adrienne always made a complicated and charming ritual of the occasion, boiling the water on their own little spirit-kettle and measuring the tea from her own caddy—the very same kettle and caddy, she told him, that had accompanied herself and her mother on all their travels. And to see the cups and bread and butter and not to have

her there, added a poignant taste of abandonment to his loneliness.

She kept the kettle in her room and when the boy was gone he softly opened the door and went in. It would keep his heart up to have the water boiling in readiness for her arrival. He recognized, as he stood, then, and looked about him, that his instinct had also been that of taking refuge. In her room he could more closely recover the sense of her presence.

She had finished all the essentials of her packing and her box stood with its lid open ready for the last disposals. Yet the room seemed still full of her personality. He noted it all gazing around him with eyes almost those of a solemn little boy permitted to glance in at a Christmas-tree.

Her dressing-table, improvised from the mantelpiece, was neatly laid out with small, worn, costly, and immaculate appurtenances. He moved forward and looked at them, not touching. The initials intertwined on the backs of the ivory brushes were her girlish ones: A. T. She had discarded, long since, no doubt, her wedding toilet set.

If he became her husband, the thought crossed his mind and quickened his heart, he might brush her hair for her, that wonderful golden hair, before many months were over.

Near the ivory hand-glass stood two photographs in a folding frame of faded blue leather. He stooped to look and saw that one was of Mrs. and the other certainly of Mr. Toner, in their early days. Remote, mysterious and alien, their formally directed eyes looked back at him and in the father's ingenuous young countenance, surmounted by a roll of hair that was provincial without being exactly rural, the chin resting upon a large, peculiar collar, he could strangely retrace Adrienne's wide brow and steadfast light-filled eyes. Mrs. Toner wore a ruffled dress and of her face little remained distinct but the dark gaze—forceful and ambiguously gentle.

The room was full of the fragrance that was not a fragrance and that had, long ago, reminded him of Fuller's earth. A pair of small blue satin *mules* stood under a chair near the bed.

Only after he had withdrawn, gently closing the door behind him, did he realize that he had forgotten the kettle and then he felt that he could not go back again. A moment after the boy returned with a note, sent, by hand, he was informed, from the Croix Rousse.

"I am so dreadfully sorry, so disappointed," he read. "Our last afternoon, but I can't get away yet. Don't wait dinner for me, if I should be late, even for that. I won't be very late, I promise, and we will have our evening."

The note had no address. He rushed forth and down to find the messenger gone. Had he only known where to seek her in the vast, high, melancholy district of the Croix Rousse he would have gone to join her. His sense of loneliness was almost a panic.

Of course, he tried to fix his mind on that realization, as he went back to the salon, her rapatriés had no doubt preoccupied her mind, from the first, quite as much as their own situation. She had spoken to him in especial of this family and of their sorrows. One child they had left dead at Evian and the mother, on the eve of their return to their Northern home, had become too desperately ill to travel. "Such dear, good, *gentle* people," he recalled her saying. No; he must not repine. After all he had only the one thing to say to her; and the evening would be long enough for that.

It was nearly seven when he heard her quick footstep outside. When she entered, the brim of her little hat, in the electric light, cast a sharp shadow over her eyes, but he saw at once that she had been crying.

She came in so quickly that he had not time to rise and, going to him, behind his chair, she put her hands on his shoulders and pressed him down, saying: "I'm so sorry to have left you all alone."

It was astonishingly comforting to have her put these fraternal hands upon him like this. She had never done it before. Yet there was a salty smart in her words to him. What else did she intend to do but leave him all alone for always?

"I'm dreadfully lonely, I confess," he said, "and I see that you're dreadfully tired."

She went round to the other side of the table and sat down, not looking at him and said, in a low voice: "Oh—the seas—the seas of misery."

"You are completely worn out," he said. He was not thinking so much of the seas of misery as of his few remaining hours. Were they to be spoiled by her fatigue?

"No; not worn out. Not at all worn out," said Adrienne, stretching her arms along the table in front of her as she sat, and though she had wept he could see something of ardour, of a strength renewed, in the lines of her pallid lips. "I've sat quite still all afternoon. I've been with him. She died soon after I got there. At the end she was talking about the little girl's grave at Evian. I was able to comfort her about that. She was so afraid it would not be tended. That it would have no flowers. Joséphine will go to Evian afterwards and see about it. There are always dear nuns to do those things. There was a nun with her to-day. That was the greatest comfort of all; and the priest who came. But I was with the father and the five poor little children; so frightened and miserable. I could not leave them, you see. He talked and talked and talked. It helped him to talk and tell me about their home and how they had had everything so nice and bright. Linen, a garden, a goat and fowls. Oh, if only she could have seen her home again! That was what he kept saying and saying. They were full of hope when they got to Evian. He told me how the children sang at dawn when the train panted up the mountain among the golden trees. Like birds, he said, and *Vive la France*! They all believed they were to be safe and happy. *Et, Madame, c'était notre calvaire qui commencait alors seulement.*"

She spoke, not really thinking of him, he saw, absorbed still in the suffering she had just left, measuring her power against such problems and the worse ones to which she was travelling to-morrow.

"Joséphine will be with them, I hope," she went on presently, "in three or four days. She will help them to get home and then she will come back and go to see about the grave at Evian. Joséphine is a tower of strength for me."

Her eyes were raised to him now, and, as they rested, he saw the compunction, the solicitude, with which they had met him on her entrance, return to them. "I'm not so very late, am I?" she said, rising. "I'll take off my hat and be ready in a moment."

"Don't hurry," said Oldmeadow.

She was tired, more tired than she knew. During dinner she hardly spoke, and, finding the resolve suddenly, he said, as they came back to their salon: "Do you know what you must do now. Go and lie down and rest for an hour. Until nine. It's not unselfishness. I'd rather have half of you to talk to for our last talk, than none of you at all."

“How dear of you,” she said. She looked at him with gratitude and, still, with the compunction. “It would be a great rest. It would be better for our talk. I can go to sleep at once, you know. Like Napoleon,” she added with a flicker of her playfulness.

When she had gone into her room Oldmeadow went out and walked along the quai. The night was dark and dimmed with fog, but there was a moon and as he walked he watched it glimmer on the windows of St. Jean. He seemed to see the august form of the cathedral through a watery element and the grey and silver patterns of the glass were like the scales of some vast fish. A sort of whale waiting to swallow up the Jonah that was himself, he reflected, and, leaning his elbows on the parapet of the quai, the analogy carried him further and he saw the cathedral like a symbol of Adrienne’s life—her “big, big” life—looming there before him, becoming, as the moon rose higher, more and more visible in its austere and menacing majesty. What was his love to measure itself against such a vocation?—for that was what it came to, as she had said. She was as involved, as harnessed, as passionately preoccupied as a Saint Theresa. How could he be fitted in with Serbia and all the hordes of human need and wretchedness that he saw her sailing forward to succour? He knew a discouragement deeper than any he had felt, for he was not a doctor and his physical strength was crippled by his wounds; and, shaking his shoulders in the chilly November air, he turned his back on the cathedral and leaned against the parapet to look up through leafless branches where the plane tassels still hung, at the lighted windows of the hotel; their hotel, where the room, still theirs, waited for them. He felt himself take refuge in the banal lights. After all, she wasn’t really a Saint Theresa. There was human misery everywhere to succour. Couldn’t she, after a winter in Serbia, found crêches and visit slums in London? The masculine scepticism she had detected in him had its justification. Women weren’t meant to go on, once the world’s crisis past, doing feats of heroism; they weren’t meant for austere careers that gave no leisure and no home. The trivial yet radiant vision of intimacy rose again before him. She slept there above him and he was guarding her slumber. He would always watch over her and guard her. He would follow her round the world, if need be, and brush her hair for her in Serbia or California.

CHAPTER IX

The gilt clock on the mantelpiece pointed to nine, but when he went to Adrienne’s door and listened there was no sound within her room, and his heart sank as he wondered if she might not sleep on, in her fatigue, sleep past all possible hour for their colloquy. Yet he did not feel that he could go in and wake her. The analogy of the cathedral loomed before him. It would be like waking Saint Theresa.

He walked up and down the empty, glittering salon; walked and walked until the clock struck ten. Desperation nerved him then and he went again to her door and knocked.

With hardly a pause her voice answered him; yet he knew that he had awakened her and it echoed for him with the pathos of so many past scenes of emergency when it must so have answered a summons from oblivion: “Coming, coming.” Among bombings, he reflected; and sudden terrible influxes of dying men from the front.

“Coming,” he heard her repeat, on a note of dismay. She had sprung up, turned on her light and seen the hour.

He was reminded vividly, as he saw her enter—and it was as if a great interval of time had separated them—of his first meeting with her. She was so changed; but now as then she was more composed than anyone he had ever met.

But it was of much more than the first meeting that the pale, still face reminded him. His dreams were in it; the dream where she had come to him along the terrace, lifting her hand in the moonlight; and the dream of horror when he had again and again pushed it down to drown.

“I’m so ashamed,” she said, and he saw that it was with an effort she smiled. The traces of her weeping were now, after her sleep, far more visible, ageing her, yet making her, too, look younger; like a child with swollen lids and lips. “I didn’t know I was so tired. I slept and slept. I didn’t stir until I heard your knock. Never mind. We’ll talk till midnight.”

She was very sorry for him.

She sat down at the table and under the electric chandelier her braided hair showed itself all ruffled and disarranged. She had on her dark travelling dress and she had thrust her feet into the pale blue satin *mules*. The disparity of costume in one so accurate, her air of readiness for the morrow, made him feel her transitoriness almost more than her presence, though his sense of that pressed upon him with a stifling imminence. Even though she sat there the room kept its look of desolate, glittering emptiness and more than their shared life in it he remembered the far places from which she had come and to which she was going. It was as if she had just arrived and were pausing for the night *en route*.

As he had seen them years ago, so he saw again the monster engines crossing the prairies at night and flying illumined pennons of smoke against the sky as they bore her away from blue seas, golden sands, a land where the good and gifted lurked behind every bush; and before her stretched the shining rails, miles and miles of them, running through ruin and desolation, that were to bear her ever onwards into the darkness. This was what life had brought her to. She had been only a sojourner among them at Coldbrooks. The linked life of order and family affection had cast her forth and he saw her, for ever now, unless he could rescue her, with only hotels to live in and only the chaos she was to mould, to live for. She seemed already, as she sat there under the light with her ruffled hair, to be sitting in the train that was to bear her from him.

“I think you owe me till midnight, at least,” he said. He had not sat down. He stood at some little distance from her leaning, his arms folded, against a gilded and inlaid console. “We’ve lots of things to talk about.”

“Have we?” Adrienne asked, smiling gently, but as if she humoured an extravagance. “We’ll be together, certainly, even if we don’t talk much. But I have some things to say, too.”

She had dropped her eyes to her hands which lay, lightly crossed, on the table before her, and she seemed to reflect how best to begin. “It’s about Nancy and Barney,” she said. “I wanted, before we part, to talk to you a little about them. There are things that trouble me and you are the only person with whom I can keep in touch. You will

know how I shall be longing to hear, everything. You'll let me know at once, won't you?"

"At once," said Oldmeadow.

"There might be delays and difficulties," Adrienne went on. "I shall be very troubled until all that is clear. And then the money. You know about the money? Barney isn't well off and he was worse off after I'd come and gone. I tried to arrange that as best I could. Palgrave understood and entered into all my feelings."

"Yes; I'd heard. You arranged it all very cleverly," said Oldmeadow.

He moved away now and, at the other end of the room, his back to her, came to a standstill, while his eyes dwelt on a large gilt-framed engraving that hung there; some former Salon triumph; a festive, spring-tide scene where young women in bustles and bonnets offered sugar to race-horses in a meadow, admired by young men in silk hats.

"Do you think this may make a difficulty?" Adrienne asked. "Make him more reluctant to take what is to come to him? It's Mrs. Chadwick's now, you know."

"You've arranged it all so well," said Oldmeadow, noting the gardenias in the young men's button-holes, "that I don't think they can get away from it."

"But will they hate it dreadfully?" she insisted, and he felt that her voice in its added urgency protested, though unconsciously, against his distance; "I seem to see that they might. If they can't take it as a sign of accepted love, won't they hate it?"

"Well," said Oldmeadow, trying to reflect, though his mind was far from Barney and Nancy, "dear Eleanor Chadwick doesn't mind taking it, whatever it's a sign of. And since it will come to Barney through her, I don't think there'll be enough personality left hanging about it to hurt much."

"I wish they could take it as a sign of accepted love," Adrienne murmured.

"Perhaps they will," he said. "I'll do my best that they shall, I promise you."

It was one thing to promise it and another to know his hope that it might be a promise never to be redeemed. The cross-currents in his own thought made him light-headed as he stood there, his back to her, and examined the glossy creatures in the meadow. "Do you think it will all take a long time?" Adrienne added, after a little pause. "Will they be able to marry in six or eight months, say?"

"It depends on how soon Barney takes action. Say about a year," he suggested. "They'd wait a little first, wouldn't they?"

"I hope not. They've waited so long already. I hope it will be as soon as possible. I shall feel so much more peaceful when I hear they're married. Could you, perhaps, make them see that, too?"

And again he promised. "I'll make them see everything I can."

He turned to her at last. She sat, her face still downcast in its shadow, while the light glittered on her wreaths of hair. Her hands still lay before her on the table, and the light fell on her wedding-ring. Perhaps she was looking at the ring.

"It all depends on something else," he heard himself say suddenly.

She turned her head and looked round at him. His attitude, his distance from her, drew her attention rather than his words, for she repeated mildly: "On something else?"

"Whether I can keep those promises, you know," said Oldmeadow. "Yes, it all depends on something else. That's what I want to talk to you about."

He hardly knew what he was saying as he approached the table and pushed the brocaded chair, companion to the one in which she sat, a little from its place. He leaned on its back and looked down at her hands and Adrienne kept her eyes on him, attentive rather than perplexed.

"May I talk to you about it now?" he asked. "It's something quite different."

"Oh, do," said Adrienne. She drew her hands into her lap and sat upright, in readiness. And, suddenly, as he was silent, she added: "About yourself? I've been forgetting that, haven't I? I've only been thinking of my side. You have quite other plans, perhaps. Perhaps you're not going back to England for ever so long. Is it an appointment?"

"No; not an appointment," he muttered, still looking down, at the table now, since her hands were no longer there. "But perhaps I shan't be going back for a long time. I hope not."

"Oh," she murmured. And now he had perplexed her. After what he had just promised her, his hope must perplex and even trouble her. "Do tell me," she said.

"It's something I want to ask you," said Oldmeadow—"And it will astonish you. You may find it hard to forgive; because I've meant to ask it from the beginning; from our deciding to go away together. As far back as the time in the hospital."

"But you may ask anything. Anything at all," she almost urged upon him. "After what I've asked you—you have every right. If there's anything I can do in the wide, wide world for you—oh! you know how glad and proud I should be. As for forgiveness"—he heard the smile in her voice, she was troubled, yet tranquil, too—"you're forgiven in advance."

"Am I? Wait and see." He, too, tried to smile, as he used the tag; but it was a mechanical smile and he felt his heart knocking against the chair-back as he went on: "Because I haven't done what you asked me to do as you asked me to do it. I haven't done it from the motive you supposed. It's been for Barney and for Nancy and for you; but it's been most of all for myself." He screwed his glass into his eye as he spoke with a gesture as mechanical as the smile had been and he looked at her at last, thus brought nearer. "I want you not to go on to-morrow." It was the first, the evident, the most palpable desire that rose to his lips. "I want you never to go on again, alone. If you can't stay with me, I want you to let me follow you. When the time comes I want you to marry me. I love you."

The light as it fell on her seemed suddenly strange, almost portentous in its brilliancy. Or was it her stillness, as she sat and gazed at him after he had spoken the words, that was strange and portentous? It was as if they arrested the currents of her being and she sat tranced, frozen into the fixed shape of an astonishment too deep for emotion. Her eyes did not alter in their gentleness; but the gentleness became tragic and pitiful, like the inappropriate calm on the mask of a dead face at Pompeii, fixed in an eternal unreadiness by the engulfing lava.

She put up her hand at last and pushed back her hair. With her forehead bared she became more like the photograph of her father. When she spoke her voice was slow and feeble, like the voice of a person dangerously ill. "I

don’t understand you.”

“Try to,” said Oldmeadow. “You must begin far back.”

She still kept her hand pressed upon her hair. “You don’t mean that it’s the conventionally honourable thing to do? Oh, no; you don’t mean that?” Her face in its effort to understand was appalled.

“No; I don’t mean anything conventional,” he returned. “I’m thinking only of you. Of my love. I’ll come with you to Serbia to-morrow—if you’ll let me. I could kneel and worship you as you sit there.”

“Oh,” she more feebly murmured. She sank back in her chair.

“My darling, my saint,” said Oldmeadow, gazing at her; “if you must leave me, you’ll take that with you; that the man who destroyed you is your lover; that you are dearer to him than anything on earth.”

“Oh,” she murmured again, and she put her hands before her face. Her eyes were hidden; she had spoken no word of reproach and he could not keep himself from her. He knelt beside her, grasping the chair across, behind her. She was so near that he could have laid his head upon her breast. “Don’t leave me,” he heard his pleading voice, but she seemed so much nearer than his own voice; “or let me come. Everything shall be as you wish and when you wish. Tell me that you care, too; or that you can come to care. Tell me that you can think of me as your husband.”

She was there, with her hidden eyes, within his arms, and inevitably they closed around her, and though he heard her murmur, “Please, please, please,” he could not relinquish her. She was free and he was free. They had cut themselves off from the world. They were alone in the strange city; in the strange, bright, hallucinated room; and he knew from the ache and rapture of her nearness how he had craved it.

But, gently, he heard her say again, “Please,” and gently she put him from her and he saw her face, and her eyes full of grief and gentleness. “Forgive me,” she said.

“My darling. For what?” he almost groaned. “Don’t say you’re going to break my heart.”

She kept her hand on his breast, holding him from her while she looked into his eyes. “It is so beautiful to be loved,” she said, and her voice was still the slow, feeble voice of exhaustion. “Even when one has no right to be. Don’t misunderstand. Even when one may not love back; not in that way. Forgive me; not in that way; my dearest friend.”

“Why mayn’t you love back? Why not in that way? If it’s beautiful, why mayn’t you?”

“Sit there, will you? Yes; keep my hand. How weak I’ve been, and cruel. It can’t be. Don’t you know? Haven’t you seen? It has always been for him. He must be free; but I can never be free.”

“Oh, no. No. That’s impossible,” Oldmeadow said, leaning towards her across the table and keeping her hand in both of his. “I can’t stand that. I could stand your work, your vocation, better. But not Barney, who loves another woman. That’s impossible.”

“But it is so,” she said, softly, looking at him. “Really it is so.”

“No, no,” Oldmeadow repeated, and he raised her hand to his lips and kept it there, a talisman against the menace of her words. “He lost you. He’s gone. I’ve found you and you care for me. You can’t hide from me that you care for me. Just now. For those moments. You were mine.”

“No,” she repeated. “I was weak and cruel, but I was not yours.”

She had been incredibly near so short a time ago before. Now, looking at him, with her difficult breaths and gentle, inflexible eyes, she was incredibly remote. “I am his, only his,” she said. “I love him and I shall always love him. It makes no difference. He loves Nancy, but it makes no difference. He is my husband. The father of my baby.”

She tried to speak on steadily while she thus gave him the truth that ended all his hope; but the desperate emotion with which he received it made real and overpowering to her her outlived yet living sorrow. With all that she must relinquish laid bare to her in the passion of his eyes she could measure all that she had lost, as she had, perhaps, till then, never measured it. “Don’t you know?” she said. “Don’t you see? My heart is broken, broken, broken.”

She put her head down on her arms as she said the words and he heard her bitter weeping.

He knew, as he listened, that it was all over with him. Dimly, in the terrible suffering that wrenched at him, he received his further revelation of the nature already nearer him than any in the world. Her strength would be in all she did and felt. She had loved Barney and she would always love him. Her marriage had been to her an ultimate and indissoluble experience. That was why she had been so blind. She could not have thought of herself as a woman to be again loved and wooed.

Her hair lay against his hands, still holding hers, and he found himself stroking it, without tenderness or solicitude it seemed. It seemed to be only automatically that his fingers passed across it, while he noted its warmth and fineness and bright, lovely colour, remembering that he had thought it at the first her one indubitable beauty.

They sat there thus for a long time. The gilt clock paused, choked, then in a voice of hurrying, hoarsened silver rang out eleven strokes. Footsteps passed and faded up the corridor; doors closed. A tramway on the quai clashed and clanged, came to a noisy standstill, and moved on again with a rattling of cables and raucous blasts from a horn; and in the profound silence that followed he seemed to hear the deep old river flowing.

“Really, you see, it’s broken,” said Adrienne. She had ceased to weep, but she still leaned forward, her head upon her folded arms. “You saw it happen,” she said. “That night when you found me in the rain.”

“I’ve seen everything happen to you, haven’t I?” said Oldmeadow.

“Yes,” she assented. “Everything. And I’ve made you suffer, too. Isn’t that strange; everybody who comes near me I make suffer.”

“Well, in different ways,” he said. “Some because you are near and others because you won’t be.”

His voice was colourless. His hand still passed across her hair.

“Don’t you see,” she said, after a moment, “that it couldn’t have been. Try to see that and to accept it. Not you and me. Not Barney’s friend and Barney’s wife. In every way it couldn’t have done, really. It makes no difference for me. I’m a *déracinée*, as I said. A wanderer. But what would have become of you, all full of roots as you are? You can live it down without me. You never could have with. And how could you have wandered with me? For that must be my life.”

“You know, it’s no good trying to comfort me,” said Oldmeadow. “What I feel is that any roots I have are in you.”

“They will grow again. The others will grow again.”

“I don’t want others, darling,” said Oldmeadow. “You see, my heart is broken, too.”

She lifted her head at last and he saw her marred and ravaged face.

“It can’t be helped,” he tried to smile at her. “You weren’t there to be recognized when I first met you and now that you are there, I’ve come too late. I believe that if I’d come before Barney, you’d have loved me. It’s my only comfort.”

“Who can say,” said Adrienne. Her gaze, as she looked at him, was deep with the mystery of her acceptance. “Perhaps. It seems to me all this was needed to bring us where we are—enmity and bitterness and grief. And my love for Barney, too. Let me tell you. It’s in the past that I think of him. As if he were dead. It’s something over; done with for ever; yet something always there. How can one be a mother and forget? Even when he is Nancy’s husband and when she is a mother, I shall not cease to feel myself his wife. Perhaps you think that strange, after Meg and what I believed right for her. But it is quite clear to me, and simple. It isn’t a thing of laws and commandments; only of our own hearts. If we can love again, we may. But for me it would be impossible. With me everything was involved. I couldn’t, ever, be twice a wife.”

Silence fell between them.

“I’ll see about the little girl’s grave,” said Oldmeadow suddenly. He did not know what had made him think of it. Perhaps something that had gone on echoing in him after she had spoken of her maternity. “I’ll go to Evian to-morrow. It will spare Joséphine the journey and give me something to do. You’ll tell me the name and give me the directions before you go.”

Tears filled her eyes as she looked at him; but they did not fall. They could need no controlling. The springs of weeping must be nearly drained. “Thank you,” she said, and she looked away, seeming to think intently.

It was now too late for the tramways. They had ceased to crash and rattle by, but a sound of belated singing passed along the quais, melancholy in its induced and extravagant mirth.

The horrible sense of human suffering that had beaten in upon him at the hospital, pressed again upon his heart. He saw himself departing next day to find the abandoned grave and he saw himself standing beside her train and measuring along the shining rails the vast distances that were to bear her away for ever.

“That’s the worst,” he said. “You’re suffering too. I must see you go away and know that you are unhappy. I must think of you as unhappy. With a broken heart.”

Her eyes, after she had thanked him, had been fixed in the intent reverie. She, too, perhaps, had been seeing those tides of misery, the sea of which she had spoken, breaking in tragic waves for ever; so unchanged by all the alleviations that love or mercy could bring; and it was perhaps with despair that she saw herself as one with it. Her eyes as she turned them on him were full of distance and of depth and, with sickening grief, he felt that a woman with a broken heart could do nothing more for herself or for him.

But her thought, whatever the voids of darkness it had visited, drew nearer and nearer to his need as she looked at him. Something of her own strong vigilance was in the look, bringing the seagull to his mind. The seagull caught and battered by the waves, with sodden wings, half dragged down, yet summoning its strength to rise from the submerging sea.

“But you can be happy with a broken heart,” she said. Their hands had fallen apart long since. She stretched out hers now and took his in her small, firm grasp.

“Can you?” he asked.

“You mustn’t think of me like this,” she said, and it was as if she read his thoughts and their imagery. “I went down, I know; like drowning. Sometimes the waves break over you and pull you down, and there seems nothing else in all the world but yourself and what you’ve suffered. But it doesn’t last. Something brings you up again.”

Something had brought her up again now. His darkness. His misery. It was as if he saw her spread her wings and saw her eyes measuring, for them both, the spaces of sea and sky.

He remembered a picture in a book he had loved as a little boy: little Diamond held to the breast of the North Wind as she flies forth in her streaming hair against a sky of stars. So he felt himself lying on her breast and lifted with her.

“I’ve told you how happy I can be. It’s all true,” she said. “It’s all there. The light, the peace, the strength. I shall find them. And so will you.”

“Shall I?” he questioned gently. “Without you?”

“Yes. Without me. You will find them. But you won’t be without me,” said Adrienne.

Already she was finding them. He knew that, for, as she looked at him, he felt an influence passing from her to him like the laying of her hand upon his brow. But it was closer than that. It was to her breast that her eyes held him while, in a long silence, the compulsion of her faith flowed into him. First quietness; then peace; then a lifting radiance.

“Promise me,” he heard her say.

He did not know what it was he must promise, but he seemed to feel it all without knowing and he said: “I promise.”

She rose and stood above him. “You mustn’t regret. You mustn’t want.”

She laid her hands upon his shoulders as she spoke and looked down at him, so austere, so radiant. “Anything else would have spoiled it. We were only meant to find each other like this and then to part.”

“I’ll be good,” said Oldmeadow. It was like saying one’s prayers at one’s mother’s knees and his lips found the child-like formula.

“We must part,” said Adrienne. “I have my life and you have yours and they take different ways. But you won’t be without me, I won’t be without you. How can we be, when we will never, never forget each other and our love?”

He looked up at her. He had put out his hands and they grasped her dress as a donor in a votive altarpiece grasps the Madonna’s healing garment. It was not, he knew, to keep her. It was rather in an accepting relinquishment that he held her thus for their last communion, receiving through touch and sight and hearing her final benison.

“I will think of you every day, until I die,” she said. “I will pray for you every day. Dear friend—dearest friend—God bless and keep you.”

She had stooped to him and for a transcending moment he was taken into her strong, life-giving embrace. The climax of his life was come as he felt her arms close round him and her kiss upon his forehead. And as she held him thus he believed all that she had said and all for which she could have found no words. That he should find the light and more and more feel their unity in it: that the thought of her would be strength to him always; as the thought of him and of his love would be strength to her.

After she had gone, he sat for a long time bathed in the sense of her life, and tasting, for that span of time, her own security of eternal goodness.

THE END

Typographical error was corrected by the etext transcriber:
“Adriennes mustn’t fail,” said Mrs. Averil dryly. “The only justification for Adriennes is to be in the right. =>
“Adrienne mustn’t fail,” said Mrs. Averil dryly. “The only justification for Adrienne is to be in the right. {pg 241}

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