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A YOUNG MAN'S YEAR

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE GOD IN THE CAR
A CHANGE OF AIR
A MAN OF MARK
THE CHRONICLES OF COUNT ANTONIO
PHROSO
SIMON DALE
THE KING'S MIRROR
QUISANTÉ
THE DOLLY DIALOGUES
A SERVANT OF THE PUBLIC
TALES OF TWO PEOPLE
THE GREAT MISS DRIVER
MRS. MAXON PROTESTS

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BY

ANTHONY HOPE

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CHAPTER I

OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE, ESQUIRE

It was a dark, dank, drizzly morning in March. A dull mist filled all the air, and the rain drifted in a thin sheet across the garden of the Middle Temple. Everything looked a dull drab. Certainly it was a beastly morning. Moreover—to add to its offences—it was Monday morning. Arthur Lisle had always hated Monday mornings; through childhood, school, and university they had been his inveterate enemies—with their narrow rigorous insistence on a return to work, with the end they put to freedom, to leisure, to excursions in the body or in the spirit. And they were worse now, since the work was worse, in that it was not real work at all; it was only waiting for work, or at

best a tedious and weary preparation for work which did not come and (for all that he could see) never would come. There was no reason why it ever should. Even genius might starve unnoticed at the Bar, and he was no genius. Even interest might fail to help a man, and interest he had none. Standing with his hands in the pockets, listlessly staring out of the window of his cell of a room, unable to make up his mind how to employ himself, he actually cursed his means of subsistence—the hundred and fifty pounds a year which had led him into the fatal ambition of being called to the Bar. "But for that it would have been impossible for me to be such an ass," he reflected gloomily, as he pushed back his thick reddish-brown hair from his forehead and puckered the thin sensitive lines of his mouth into a childish pout.

Henry the clerk (of whom Mr. Arthur Lisle owned an undivided fourth share) came into the room, carrying a bundle of papers tied with red tape. Turning round on the opening of the door, Arthur suddenly fell prey to an emotion of extraordinary strength and complexity; amazement, joy, excitement, fear, all in their highest expression, struggled for mastery over him. Had he got a Brief?

"Mr. Norton Ward says, will you be kind enough to protect him in Court III, in case he's on in the Court of Appeal? It's a very simple matter, he says; it's the Divisional Court, sir, third in the list." Henry put the papers on the table and went out, quite disregardful of the storm of emotion which he had aroused. Though keenly interested in the fortunes of his employers, he did not study their temperaments.

It had happened, the thing that Arthur knew he ought always to hope for, the thing that in fact he had always dreaded. He had not got a brief; he had to "hold" one—to hold one for somebody else, and that at short notice—"unhouseled, disappointed, unanealed!" That is to say, with no time to make ready for the fearful ordeal. It was nearly ten o'clock, at half-past he must be in court; at any moment after that the case might come on, its two predecessors having crumpled up, as cases constantly did in the Divisional Court. The fell terrors of nervousness beset him, so that he was almost sick. He dashed at the brief fiercely, but his fingers trembled so that he could hardly untie the tape. Still, he managed a hurried run through the papers and got the point into his head.

Lance and Pretyman, JJ., took their seats punctually at ten-thirty. Arthur Lisle, who felt much interest in judges as human beings and would often spend his time in court studying them rather than the law they administered, was glad to see Lance there, but feared Pretyman to the bottom of his heart. Lance was a gentle man, of courtly manners and a tired urbanity, but Pretyman was gruff, abrupt, terribly anxious about saving public time, and therefore always cutting into a man's argument with the Stand-and-deliver of a question to which, in Pretyman's opinion, there was no answer. It would be an awful thing if Pretyman set on him like that! Because then he might be incapable of speech, although he knew that he was in the right. And he believed that his case was good. "All the worse then, if you lose it!" said a mocking voice within him.

Henry had taken him over to the court and had done everything possible for him—had told the solicitor who had briefed Norton Ward how the matter stood and how very safe he would be in Mr. Lisle's hands if it came to that, had given his name to the usher so that the usher could, if necessary, give it to the Bench, and had even introduced him to Mr. O'Sullivan, who was on the other side, a tall and burly Irishman, famous for defending criminals, but not credited with knowing much law.

As the first two cases proceeded, Arthur read his brief again and again, and, when he was not doing that, he read the reported case which (in the opinion of the pupil who had got up Norton Ward's brief and had made a note of it for him) was decisive in his favour. All the while he was praying that the first two cases might last a long time. They did not. Pretyman, J., smashed the pair of them in three-quarters of an hour. "Brown and Green" called the usher, and O'Sullivan was on his legs—and there was no sign of Norton Ward. Henry nodded to Arthur and left the court; he was going to see how matters stood in the Court of Appeal.

"This is an appeal from the West Hampstead County Court, my lords," began Mr. O'Sullivan, "which raises a question of some importance," and he went on in such a fashion that Arthur hoped he was going to take a long time; for Henry had come back, and, by a shake of his head, had indicated that there was no present hope of Norton Ward's arrival. Mr. O'Sullivan meant to take a decently long time; he wanted his client to feel that he was getting his money's worth of argument; therefore he avoided the main point and skirmished about a good deal. Above all he avoided that case which Norton Ward's pupil had considered decisive. Mr. O'Sullivan knew all about the case too, and had it with him, but he was in no hurry to get to it yet.

Lance, J., was leaning back, the picture of polite acquiescence in a lot assigned to him by Providence, a position wherein dignity was tempered by *ennui*. But Pretyman, J., was getting restive; he was fingering his beard—he committed the solecism of wearing a beard on the Bench; then he picked out a book from the shelf by him, and turned over the leaves quickly. Mr. O'Sullivan came, by a series of flourishes, a little nearer the point. And Norton Ward did not come; and Arthur Lisle felt no better.

"What about Watkins and Chichester?" demanded Pretyman, J., with a sudden violence that made Arthur jump.

"I have that case here, my lord, and——"

"You don't seem in a hurry to cite it, Mr. O'Sullivan. It seems to me dead in your teeth."

"Let us hear the headnote, Mr. O'Sullivan," said Lance, J., suavely.

Then they got to it, and Pretyman, J., and Mr. O'Sullivan had a fine wrangle over it, worrying it up and down, one saying that this was that case, the other that this case was not that case, because in that case that happened and in this case this happened, and so forth. Mr. O'Sullivan "distinguished" valiantly, and Pretyman knocked his distinctions into a cocked hat. Lance, J., sat on smiling in silence, till at last he asked blandly:

"If we think the cases indistinguishable, Watkins and Chichester binds us, I take it, Mr. O'Sullivan?"

That Mr. O'Sullivan had to admit, and on that admission down he sat.

The moment had come—and Norton Ward had not. With an actual physical effort Arthur rose to his feet; a strange voice, which did not seem to belong to him, and sounded quite unfamiliar, said, "My lords——" He saw Lance and Pretyman, JJ., in the shape of a grotesque, monstrous, two-headed giant; for the latter was leaning over to the former, who sat listening and twice nodded his head.

A slip of paper was handed up to Lance, J. He glanced at it and from it to Arthur. Again that strange voice said, "My lords——" But Lance, J., interposed suavely, "I don't think we need trouble you, Mr. Lisle," and he proceeded to say that not even Mr. O'Sullivan's ingenious arguments could enable his brother or himself to distinguish Brown and Green from Watkins and Chichester, and therefore the appeal must be dismissed with costs.

"I concur," said Pretyman, J., with contemptuous curtness; in fact he did not say "I" at all; he merely grunted out "Concur."

Of course such a thing happened often, and was quite likely to happen; very probably Norton Ward, after glancing over his pupil's note and at *Watkins v. Chichester*, had seen that it might happen here and had the less scruple about entrusting his case to hands so inexperienced. None the less, Arthur Lisle felt that the gods had played a cruel game with him. All that agony of apprehension, all that tension of desperate coward's courage, endured for nothing and gone for nothing! All to be endured and achieved again—how soon? He got out of court he hardly knew how, and made his way hurriedly across the Strand. He would have that wig and gown off, or somebody else would be tapping him on the shoulder, arresting him with the stern command to hold another brief!

Now, back in chambers, with the strain over, he was furious with himself, savage and furious; that mood follows hard on the paroxysms of the malady. He began to attribute to it all the failures of his past life—quite unjustly, for in most cases, though it had tortured him, he had overcome the outward manifestation of it. He could not see his life as liveable if it were to meet him at every turn. What made him a prey to it? Self-consciousness, silly self-consciousness, his wise elders had always told him. But what made people self-conscious? Self-conceit, the same wise mentors had added. His soul rose in a plain and sincere protest, certain of its truth: "But I'm not conceited." "Yes, but" (he imagined the mentors' argument now) "you really are; you think everybody's looking at you and thinking of you." "Well, but so they are when I'm on my legs speaking; and beforehand I know they're going to be." The mentors did not seem to have anything to say to that.

In the afternoon Norton Ward came into his room to thank him for holding the brief; he was a man of punctilious courtesy, as indeed he was master of most of the arts and gifts that make for success in life. At little more than thirty he had already a fine practice; he was on the edge of "taking silk"; he had married well—the daughter of a peer, with a substantial portion; he was a "prospective" candidate for Parliament. A favourite of nature and of fortune indeed! Moreover he was a kindly man, although a ruthlessly ambitious one. He and Arthur had become acquainted merely through the accident of Arthur's renting the spare room in his chambers, when he had been called to the Bar a twelve-month before; but the landlord had taken to his tenant and would gladly have done him a turn.

"I thought the case quite plain," he said; "but I'm sorry you were done out of your argument."

"I wasn't sorry," Arthur confessed, with a frankness habitual to him.

"You weren't? Oh, I see! Nervous!" He laughed gently.

"Beyond belief. Did you used to be?"

"Just at first. I soon got over it. But they say one oughtn't to get over it. Oh, you've heard the stories about big men, haven't you? Anyhow some men never do. Why, I've sat behind Huntley and seen his hand tremble like our old friend the aspen leaf—and that when he was Attorney-General!"

"Lord!" was Arthur's despairing comment; because a malady which did not spare an Attorney-General must surely be unconquerable by lesser folk.

"But I expect it's not quite the same sort," Norton Ward went on, smiling. "It's rather like falling in love, I expect. A man's excited every time he falls in love, but I don't think it's the same sort of excitement as he suffers when he falls in love for the first time—I mean badly."

Now the last word of this observation so struck Arthur that he forgot all the earlier part of it—nay, he forgot his malady itself, together with the truth or falsity of the parallel Norton Ward suggested.

"Badly? What do you mean by falling in love badly?"

"I'm not speaking with regard to morals, Lisle. I mean severely, or utterly, or passionately, or, if

you prefer, idiotically."

Arthur's lips puckered about his pipe-stem; it was a trick he had.

"I think I should call that falling in love well, not badly," he observed gravely.

It was the gravity of the speaker, not the import of the thing spoken, which made Norton Ward laugh again and heartily. His was one of those temperaments—sane, practical, concrete, equable—which regard the affairs of love as a very subsidiary matter in real life, in the real life of any individual, that is, for of course they possess a national and racial importance when reduced to statistics. He did not quarrel with the literary convention which exalted love to the highest place—the convention made good reading and produced exciting plays—but it did not answer to real life as he knew it, to the stern yet delightful fight which filled his days, and really filled his wife's too, since she was a partner wherever she could be, and an eager encourager in all things. But what of the great amorists who were also great men and women? Well, how much of that too was play-acting—to the public and to themselves? That was the question his mind instinctively put about such cases.

As he looked at Arthur Lisle's slight figure and sensitive face, he felt a compassion for him, a pitying doubt whether so frail a vessel could live in the rough sea on which it had embarked. Characteristically this friendly impulse expressed itself in an invitation to dinner, which was received by Arthur with surprise, delight, and gratitude.

"Of course I will, and it really is most awfully kind of you," he said.

Norton Ward went off to a consultation with a smile of mingled pity and amusement still on his lips.

His invitation to dinner really pleased Arthur very much, not only as a sign of friendship, but for its own sake. He had found his early days in London lonely—in depressing contrast with the full social life of school and Oxford. The glowing anticipations with which imagination had invested his coming to the metropolis had not stood the test of experience. For some young men family connections, or notable achievements and high reputation, provide a ready-made place in London. Others possessed of ample means can make a pretty good one for themselves speedily. But Arthur's university career, though creditable and to him delightful in the highest degree from its teeming fulness of interests, had not been conspicuous; he had no powerful friends, and he was very poor. After his chambers were paid for, and his share in Henry, and his lodgings in Bloomsbury Street, there was left not much margin beyond the necessities of life—food, raiment, and tobacco. The theatre, even the pit, could not be indulged in often. He had many solitary evenings. When it was fine, he often walked the streets; when it was wet he read—and often stopped reading to wish that something would happen. His vague and restless longings took no form more definite than that—wanting something to happen. He was in London, he was young, he was ready—and nothing happened! Consequently an invitation to dinner was a prize in the daily lottery of life.

When he got back to his 'diggings' in the evening, he found a letter from home. His mother and sister had continued to live on in the old house at Malvern Wells after the death of his father, who had enjoyed a fairly good practice as a doctor there, but dying comparatively early had left a slender provision for his family. Mrs. Lisle preferred to be poor, since poor she had to be, in a place where she was already known and respected. The school too was a great attraction; there Arthur had been educated as a day boy, and thence had proceeded to Oxford with an exhibition, to which he added a second from his college, thus much easing the family finances, and indeed rendering Oxford possible. There had been talk of his people's migrating to London and making a home for him there, but in fact none of the three had been zealous for the change. Mrs. Lisle was frail and clung to her accustomed hills and breezes; Anna had her friends, her circle, her church work, her local importance; and Arthur was at that time too full of those glowing anticipations of London life to press the project of a family villa somewhere in the suburbs and a season-ticket to take him out of town at the precise hour of the evening when town began to be amusing.

For all that, he was an affectionate son and brother, and he smiled sympathetically over Anna's home gossip. Only the postscript made him frown rather peevishly. It ran: "Mother wants to know whether you have called on the Godfrey Lisles *yet*!"

Mother wanted to know that in pretty nearly every one of her own and Anna's letters; hence the italics which distinguished Anna's "yet." And the answer still had to be in the negative. Why should he call on the Godfrey Lisles? He knew his mother's answer; a thoroughly maternal answer it was. Godfrey Lisle, though only a distant cousin, was the head of the house, squire of Hilsey Manor, the old family place, and a man of considerable wealth—altogether, in fact, the Personage of the family. Most families have a Personage, to them very important, though varying infinitely in significance or insignificance to the world outside. On the whole the Lisle Personage was above the average from the outside point of view, and Mrs. Lisle's anxiety that her son should pay him proper attention, and reap therefrom such advantage as might accrue, was no more than natural.

But to Arthur all the reasons why he ought to call on his cousin were reasons why he could not do it. Just as, while Mr. O'Sullivan was arguing, his imagination was picturing what a young fool Pretyman, J., would soon be thinking him, so here, whenever the question of this call arose, the same remorselessly active faculty rehearsed for him all the aspects in which he would appear to the Godfrey Lisles—a poor relation, a tiresome duty, a country cousin, a raw youth—Oh, in fine and in the end, a Bore of purest quality and great magnitude! That, and nothing else, the Godfrey Lisles would think him.

Still, if his mother persisted, the thing might have to happen. He had a vision of himself watching the Godfrey Lisles out of their house, and then diving across the road to deposit furtive cards with the butler. A funny vision, but with him quite capable of turning into reality!

His brow cleared as he took up a second letter which awaited him. He knew the hand:

"Dear Mr. Lisle,

"Do drop in to-morrow evening after dinner. We shall be having cards and perhaps a little music. About 9.30. Do as you like about dressing.

"Yours sincerely,
"Marie Sarradet."

The Sarradets lived in Regent's Park—rather far from any Underground station. "I'll dress if it's fine, and not if it's wet," thought Arthur. The balance of profit and loss as between paying a cab-fare on the one hand and taking the shine out of his patent leathers on the other presented a problem of constant difficulty in connection with his evening gaieties.

CHAPTER II

MISS SARRADET'S CIRCLE

A hundred and fifty years ago or thereabouts a certain Jacques Sarradet had migrated from his native Lyons and opened a perfumer's shop in Cheapside. The shop was there still, and still a Sarradet kept it, and still it was much esteemed and frequented by City men, who bought presents or executed commissions for their wives and daughters there. To folk of fashion the Bond Street branch was better known, but which was the more profitable only the master knew. Together, at all events, they were very profitable, and the present Mr. Clement Sarradet was a warm man—warmer than he let the world know, or even his own family, so far as he could keep the knowledge from them. He had preserved his French frugality, and, although his house in Regent's Park was comfortably and hospitably conducted, the style in which he lived was a good deal less sumptuous than English notions would have considered his income to warrant. He had preserved too, in spite of mixed marriages in the family history, something of his French air, of the appearance of a prosperous *bon bourgeois*, with his short thick-set figure, his round paunch, his stiff upstanding white hair (he had married late in life and was now over sixty), his black brows and moustache, and his cheeks where blue and red seemed, after a tussle, to have blended harmoniously into a subdued purple.

Something French, though differently French, survived also in his cherished daughter Marie, writer of the note already set forth, and mistress of the house in Regent's Park since her mother's death five years ago. Here it was manner rather than looks (she was a brunette, but not markedly); she had a vivacity, a provocativeness, a coquetry, which in less favoured races often marks a frivolous or unstable character, but in the French finds no difficulty in blending with and adorning solid good sense, sturdy business-like qualities, and even sometimes a certain toughness of tissue more certainly valuable than attractive.

The evening party to which Arthur Lisle had been bidden was drawing to its close. They had played cards; they had had some music; they had ended up with a couple of "topping" comic songs from Joe Halliday, and they were still laughing over these as they munched sandwiches and sipped, according to sex, lemonade or whisky-and-soda. Mr. Sarradet watched them benevolently, thinking them a very pleasant set of young people, and admiring the way in which his daughter exercised a pretty dominion over this little band of chosen friends. The two girls, Mildred Quain and Amabel Osling, openly acknowledged her leadership; the men deferred to her, not only as the hostess (a position which she generally occupied), but as the centre of attraction and the deviser of pleasures, the organiser of visits to theatres and concerts, and of their lawn-tennis at the Acton ground in the spring and summer. But there was a touch of shrewd anxiety in his watching. Young men were wont to aspire to more than friendship where they found metal attractive to their eyes. Mr. Sarradet was ambitious for his daughter.

"Next Monday, then, we'll all meet at His Majesty's," Marie announced—or commanded. She turned to Joe Halliday. "You get the tickets. And anybody who likes can come back here to supper afterwards."

"Splendid, dear!" said Amabel Osling, a dark girl with large eyes and a rather intense manner; she wore what might be described as an art-frock.

"An evening out, an evening out!" chanted Joe Halliday, a big young fellow with a shock of light brown hair and a manner of exuberant good-nature and heartiness.

"I'm afraid I can't come," said Arthur Lisle apologetically.

"Why not, Mr. Lisle?" Marie's voice sounded certainly disappointed, perhaps rather resentful.

"I'm dining out."

Sidney Barslow looked at him with a smile, in which Arthur detected an ironical flavour. Between these two members of the circle there was, in truth, no love lost. Barslow resented in Arthur a

superiority of breeding which all his own vanity could not enable him to ignore. Arthur found this handsome fellow, with his carefully sleek hair, his bold challenging eyes, his lady-killerish airs, in the end a 'bounder' with only a veneer of elegance; all the same he wished he had half Barslow's easy assurance and self-confidence.

"Oh, Learned Counsel is dining out?" In the Sarradet circle, being of the Bar was felt to be enough of a distinction to warrant a little chaff. "May one ask who with? The Lord Chancellor perhaps?"

They all laughed. "Presently, presently!" said Joe, patting Arthur's head. "The lad will make his way in society."

"Don't be an ass, Joe." But Arthur liked Joe as much as he disliked Barslow, and his protest was quite free from annoyance.

"Don't you want to tell us who it is, Mr. Lisle?" asked Amabel.

"Well, I don't suppose you'll be any the wiser; it's the man whose chambers I share—Norton Ward."

Now, as it chanced, Mildred Quain's uncle lived in the suburban constituency which Norton Ward was 'nursing' and was of the same political colour as the prospective candidate. Mildred had heard the candidate speak at the opening of a bazaar—and had seen the Honourable Mrs. Norton Ward perform the ceremony.

"You are among the swells, Mr. Lisle!" said Mildred, and proceeded to describe the extreme political and social eminence of the Norton Wards. Arthur, who had gratefully accepted his invitation as a human kindness, was amused at finding it regarded as a promotion, as a cause for congratulation and envy; he grew afraid that his mention of it might be taken for a boast.

"I think it was pure charity on Norton Ward's part," he laughed. "I expect he thought I was lonely."

"I dare say. He couldn't be expected to know about the likes of us," said Barslow.

"Oh, shut up, Sidney!" cried Joe Halliday. "Can't Arthur go out to dinner without your permission?"

A sudden flush spread over Barslow's face; he glared angrily at Joe. Mr. Sarradet had taken up the evening paper, and noticed nothing; but all the rest were conscious that a storm threatened the serenity of the gathering. On a trivial occasion latent jealousies had leapt to light.

Marie looked round her company with a smile which included all and betrayed no partisanship. "We'll choose another night for His Majesty's," she said. "That's quite simple. Then we can all go. And now shall we have one more song before we break up? One more from you, Joe!" As they moved towards the piano, she contrived to touch the irate Mr. Barslow lightly on the arm, to give him an arch glance, and to murmur—very low—the word "Silly!" Mr. Barslow's brow cleared wonderfully.

She wanted no quarrel and was confident of her ability to prevent one. If one came, she would have to be arbiter; she would have to take sides, and that must almost certainly mean the loss of one of her friends—either Sidney Barslow or Arthur Lisle. She did not want to lose either, for each had an attraction for her—an attraction not of mere solid friendship such as bound her to Joe Halliday, but an appeal of man to woman. Barslow's boldness, his challenge, his powerful virility drew one side of her nature with a strong magnet; to what was 'second-class' and tawdry in him she was not, by birth or breeding, very sensitive herself. On the other hand she knew that Arthur Lisle was, and admired him because he was. Nay, in a sense she was afraid of him because he was; if she did or said anything in his eyes amiss—if she shewed too much favour to Sidney Barslow, for instance—he might feel about her much as he did about the man himself. She knew all about Barslow, and all about what Barslow felt for and about herself; it was very familiar, one might say inherited, ground. With regard to Arthur Lisle all this was different; he was still, in spite of their apparent intimacy, *terra incognita*. Though he constantly frequented the house, though from a chance acquaintance of her brother's he had grown into a familiar friend, though they were fast comrades, even though she knew that he admired her, there was so much about him which she vaguely divined to be there, but could not value or analyse—notions, instincts, spots of sensitiveness, to which she remained really a stranger. How strong were they, what was their verdict on her, what their influence on him? Would a tide of admiration or passion sweep them all away? Or would they make such a tide impossible, or, even if it came, dam its course with impalpable insurmountable obstacles? In fine, would he, in spite of any feeling for her that he might have, hold her "out of the question"?

He was the last to leave that night—as he often was, for the solitude of his lodgings had no attraction for him—and she went with him to the door. The stars shone now over Regent's Park, and they lingered a moment in astronomical conversation. Then she gave him her hand, saying:

"I'm so sorry about Monday. But you must tell me all about your party afterwards!"

"I don't suppose there'll be anything to tell. Well, Mildred Quain may be interested, because of her uncle!"

"I shall be interested too—though not because of my uncle," she said with a laugh and a fleet upward glance at him. "I consider I've introduced you to London society, and I take a maternal interest in you, Mr. Lisle."

"Why do you say 'Mr. Lisle' to me? You always say 'Joe' and 'Sidney' to the others."

"So I do. I don't know!"

"Well, then, don't do it," laughed Arthur. "It makes me jealous, you know."

She looked at him for a moment, not now in provocation, rather in thought, perhaps in puzzle. "It needn't do that, anyhow," at last she said.

"Is it then a mark of respect?" he asked banteringly, finding pleasure in the perplexed little frown which persisted on her pretty face.

"Well, I speak of you as I feel about you, and I can't say any more," she answered, half laughing, but protesting too that this sort of inquisition was unfair.

"You shall do as you like then! What you do is always right." He spoke affectionately and held out his hand to her again.

She did not give him hers. She drew back a little, blushing. "Ah, if you really thought that!" After a pause, she said rather sharply, "Why don't you like Sidney Barslow?"

"I don't exactly dislike him, but sometimes he——" He waved his arm, wanting a word.

"Grates?" she suggested briefly.

"Thank you," said Arthur with a laugh. "Just every now and then, perhaps!"

She stood there a moment longer with an expression on her face which was new to him there; she looked as if she wanted to say something or ask him something, but did not dare. Though her lips smiled, there was appeal, almost timidity, in her eyes. But she turned away with no more than "Well, good-night."

Scores of times in the last year-and-a-half, since he had come to know her, he had called her "a good sort" for all the kindness and friendship she had shewn him; he had conceived for her, and her clever capable ways, an amused admiration. After these feelings there had grown up in him, by familiarity, a sort of mental friendship for her face and figure too. He never reckoned her beautiful or even very pretty, but she had a piquancy of face and a grace of figure which had gradually become very pleasant to him. That she was physically attractive had been an after-thought, but, when once it had come, it stayed. To-night he was particularly conscious of it, perhaps because of the air of timidity or self-distrust which softened her, and, softening her, flattered in him the latent masculine pride.

Though not entirely, he had been to a large extent free from boyish flirtations and philandering. The necessity of hard work, shyness and fastidiousness, bodily temperament, had all combined to keep him out of such things. One passion of a glorious Oxford summer term he had counted the real thing and remembered even now with a tender exultation; for the girl's heart had been touched, though not to the point of defying either prudence or propriety—even had he ventured to urge such courses. Save for this episode, now remote since such age quickly, he was in essence a stranger in the field of love. He did not recognise nor analyse the curious little stir which was in him as he walked home that night—the feeling of a new gaiety, a new joyfulness, a sense of something triumphant and as it were liberated and given wings. He did not even get so far as to associate it explicitly and consciously with Marie Sarradet, though he did know that never had she seemed a dearer friend or a more winning girl than she had that night. He stood by the brink of the spring of love, but had not yet drunk of it nor recognised the hand that had led him there.

The girl had gone back to her father and mixed him his 'night-cap' of hot toddy, as her custom was. While he sipped it, she stood beside him, looking down into the fire, still and meditative. Presently she became aware of his bright beady eyes set on her with a glance half-apprehensive, half-amused; she interpreted it easily.

"A long time saying good-night, was I, Pops? And you think I've been flirting? Well, I haven't, and I couldn't have if I'd wanted to. Mr. Lisle never flirts. Joe pretends to sometimes, and Sidney—does. But Mr. Lisle—never!"

"That needn't mean that a man has no serious intentions," Mr. Sarradet opined.

She smiled. "With the English I think it does. We're not quite English, even after all this time, are we? At least you and I aren't; Raymond is, I think."

"Raymond's a goose, English or not," said the father impatiently. "He's in debt again, and I have to pay! I won't leave my business to a spendthrift."

"Oh, he'll get over it. He is silly but—only twenty-two. Pops!"

"And at twenty you've as shrewd a head as I know on your shoulders! Get over it he must or——!" An indignant gulp of his 'night-cap' ended the sentence.

"If you let him go in for something that he liked better than the business——" she began.

"What business has he not to like the business! It's kept us in comfort for a hundred and fifty years. Isn't it good enough for him? It's been good enough for me and my forefathers. We've known what we were; we've never pretended to be anything else. We're honest merchants—shop-keepers. That's what we are."

"Have patience, dear, I'll talk to him," she promised gently, and soothed the old fellow, whose bark was worse than his bite.

"Well, he'll come to me for a cheque once too often, that's all," he grumbled, as he kissed his daughter and took himself off to bed.

"Honest merchants—shop-keepers. That's what we are." The words echoed through Marie Sarradet's head. It was easy to smile at them, both at their pride and at their humility, easy to call ideas of that kind quite out of date. But what if they did represent a truth, irrelevant perhaps nowadays for public or political purposes, but having its relevance and importance in personal relations, in its influence on mind and feeling? This was the direction her thoughts took, though she found no words, and only dim ideas by which to grope. Presently the ideas grew concrete in the word which she had herself suggested to Arthur Lisle and he had accepted with alacrity. Sidney Barslow 'grated' on Arthur. It was not impossible to see why, though even this she acknowledged grudgingly and with a sense of treachery—she herself found so much to like in Sidney! Exactly! There she seemed to lay her finger on the spot. If she liked Sidney, and Sidney grated on Arthur Lisle so badly—the question which she had not dared to ask at the door rose to her lips again—"Do I grate?" And was that why Arthur Lisle never flirted? Never with her, at least—for that was all she could really know on the subject.

CHAPTER III

IN TOUCH WITH THE LAW

Arthur Lisle arrived on the pavement in front of Norton Ward's house in Manchester Square five minutes before the time for which he was invited, and fifteen before that at which he would be expected to arrive. Painfully conscious of this fact, he walked first down Duke Street, and then back up Manchester Street, trying to look as if he were going somewhere else. Nor did he venture to arrive at his real destination until he had seen three vehicles deposit their occupants at the door. Then he presented himself with the air of having hurried a little, lest he should be late. None of this conduct struck him as at all unusual or ridiculous; not only now but for long afterwards it was his habit—the habit of a nervous imaginative man.

The party was not a large one—only twelve—and it was entirely legal in character. Besides host and hostess there were three couples—two barrister couples and one solicitor couple. One of the couples brought a daughter, who fell to Arthur's lot. Arthur got on very well with his girl, who was fortunately an enthusiast about lawn-tennis; she interested without absorbing him; he was able to be polite without ceasing to watch the two people who really arrested his attention, his hostess and—most strangely, most wonderfully!—Mr. Justice Lance. For at half-past eight the old Judge, by his arrival, completed the party.

A catalogue of Mrs. Norton Ward's personal attractions would sound commonplace enough. She had small features, was fair, rather pretty, rather pale, and rather short; there seemed no more to say. But she possessed a gracious candour of manner, an extreme friendliness and simplicity, a ready merriment, and together with these a complete freedom from self-consciousness. Somehow she struck Arthur as a highly refined, feminised, etherealised counterpart of Joe Halliday—they were both such good human creatures, so superlatively free from 'nonsense' of all sorts. He took to her immensely from the first moment and hoped very much that she would talk to him a little after dinner. He felt sure that he could get on with her; she did not alarm or puzzle him; he knew that he had "got her right."

When Norton Ward moved, according to ritual, into his wife's vacant place beside Mr. Justice Lance, he beckoned to Arthur to come and sit on the Judge's other side and introduced him. "You just missed the pleasure of hearing his maiden argument the other morning, Judge," he added, laughing slyly at Arthur, who had not got over the surprise of encountering Lance, J., as a private—and harmless—individual.

"Ah, I remember—a case of yours! But O'Sullivan wouldn't give Mr. Lisle a chance!"

He spoke in the same soft, rather weary voice that he had used in court; with his sparse white hair he looked older than when he was in his wig; he was very carefully dressed, and his thin fine hands wore a couple of rather ornate rings. He had keen blue eyes and a large well-shaped nose.

"I don't know that Lisle was altogether sorry! The first time! Even you remember the feeling, I dare say?"

"Nervous? Was that it, Mr. Lisle?" He smiled faintly. "You must remember that we're much inured to imperfection." He looked on the young man with a pleasant indulgence, and, at the same time, a certain attention.

"You always remember our frailty, but there are others!" said the host.

"Ah, ah! I sat with my Brother Pretyman, so I did! Perhaps he does forget sometimes that one side must be wrong. Hence the unpopularity of litigation, by the way."

Arthur was gaining his ease; the friendliness of both his companions helped him; towards the Judge he was particularly drawn; he felt that he would be all right before Lance, J., in future—if only Pretyman, J., were elsewhere! But, alas, a question was enough to plunge him back into trouble. Norton Ward had turned to talk to his other neighbour, but Sir Christopher Lance spoke to him again.

"Are you any relation to Godfrey Lisle? Lisle of Hilsey, you know."

"Yes, Sir Christopher, I'm—I'm a distant cousin."

"Well, I thought you had something of the family look. I've not had the pleasure of seeing you at his house—in town, I mean—I haven't been to Hilsey lately."

"I—I've never been there," Arthur stammered. He was blushing very red. Here he was, up against this terrible business of the Godfrey Lisles again—and just as he had begun to get along so nicely!

His confusion, nay, his distress, could not escape the Judge. "I hope I haven't made a *faux pas*, Mr. Lisle? No quarrel, or anything of that sort, I hope?"

"No, sir, but I don't know them. I haven't called yet," Arthur blurted out; he seemed to himself to be always having to blurt it out.

Sir Christopher's eyes twinkled, as, following the host's example, he rose from the table.

"If I were you, I should. You don't know what you're missing."

Upstairs Mrs. Norton Ward was better than Arthur's hopes. She showed him at once that she meant to talk to him and that she expected to like doing it.

"I'm always friends with everybody in Frank's chambers," she said, as she made him sit by her. "I consider them all part of the family, and all the glory they win belongs to the family; so you must make haste and win glory, if you can, for us!"

"I'm afraid I can't win glory," laughed Arthur. "At least it doesn't look like it—at the Bar."

"Oh, win it anyhow—we're not particular how—law, politics, literature, what you like! Why, Milton Longworth was Frank's pupil once—for a month! He did no work and got tipsy, but he's a great poet now—well, isn't he?—and we're just as proud as if he'd become Attorney-General."

"Or—well—at all events, a County Court Judge!" Arthur suggested.

"So just you do it somehow, Mr. Lisle, won't you?"

"I'll try," he promised, laughing. "The other day I heard of you in your glory. You sounded very splendid," he added.

Then he had to tell her all about how he had heard, about Mildred Quain, and so about the rest of the circle in Regent's Park. His shyness vanished; he gave humorous little sketches of his friends. Of course she knew Sarradet's shop, and was amused at this lifting of the veil which had hidden the Sarradet private life. But being the entirely natural creature she was, talking and thinking just as one of her class naturally would, she could not help treating the Sarradets as something out of her ordinary experience, as something rather funny—perhaps also instructive—to hear about, as social phenomena to be observed and studied. Without her own volition or consciousness her mind naturally assumed this attitude and expressed it in her questions and comments; neither were cruel, neither malicious, but both were absolutely from the outside—comments and questions about a foreign country addressed to a traveller who happened to have paid a visit there; for plainly she assumed, again instinctively, that Arthur Lisle was no more a native of that country than herself. Or he might almost have been an author presenting to an alert and sympathetic reader a realistic and vivacious picture of the life of a social class not his own, be it what is called higher or lower, or just quite different.

Whatever the gulf, the difference, might be—broad or narrow, justly felt or utterly exaggerated—Arthur Lisle would have been (at twenty-four) more than human not to be pleased to find himself, for Mrs. Norton Ward, on the same side of it as Mrs. Norton Ward. She was evidently quite genuine in this, as she seemed to be in everything. She was not flattering him or even putting him at his ease. She talked to him as "one of ourselves" simply because that seemed to her what he undoubtedly was—and what his friends undoubtedly, though of course quite blamelessly, were not.

They were thus in the full swing of talk—Arthur doing most of it—when the Judge came across the room and joined them. Arthur at once rose, to make way, and the lady too seemed to treat his audience as finished, although most graciously. But the Judge took hold of his arm and detained him.

"Do you know, Esther," he said, "that this young man has, by right of kinship, the *entrée* to the Shrine? And he doesn't use it!"

"What?" she cried with an appearance of lively interest. "Oh, are you related to the Godfreys, Mr. Lisle?"

Arthur blushed, but this time less acutely; he was getting, as the Judge might have put it, much inured to this matter of the Godfrey Lisles.

"Don't ask him questions about it; for some reason or another he doesn't like that."

"I don't really think my cousin Godfrey would care about——"

"Not the least the point, is it, Esther?" said the Judge with a twinkle.

"Not the least, Sir Christopher. But what's to be done if he won't go?"

"Oh, you must manage that." He squeezed Arthur's arm and then let it go.

Here, plainly, though no less graciously than from the hostess, was his dismissal. Not knowing any of the other women, he drifted back to the girl who was enthusiastic about lawn-tennis.

The Judge sat down and stretched out his shapely thin hands towards the fire; his rings gleamed, and he loved the gleam of them. To wear them had been, from his youth, one of his bits of daring;

he had, as it were, backed himself to wear them and not thereby seem himself, or let them seem, vulgar. And he had succeeded; he had been called vain often, never vulgar. By now his friends, old and young, would have missed them sadly.

"What do you make of that boy, Esther?" he asked.

"I like him—and I think he's being wasted," she answered promptly.

"At our honourable profession?"

"You and Frank are better judges of that."

"I don't know. Hardly tough enough, perhaps. But Huntley was just such a man, and he got pretty well to the top. Died, though, not much past fifty. The climb killed him, I think."

"Yes, Frank's told me about him. But I meant wasted in his own life, or socially, or however you like to put it. He's told me about his friends, and——"

"Well, if you like him enough, you can put that right, Esther."

"I like him, but I haven't much time for young men, Sir Christopher. I've a husband, you may remember."

"Then turn him over where he belongs—to Bernadette."

She raised her brows a little, as she smiled at him.

"Oh, the young fellow's got to get his baptism of fire. It'll do him good."

"How easily you Judges settle other people's fortunes!"

"In the end, his not going to his cousin's house is an absurdity."

"Well, yes, so it is, in the end, of course," she agreed. "It shall be done, Sir Christopher."

While his fortunes were thus being settled for him—more or less, and as the future might reveal—Arthur was walking home, well pleased with himself. The lady's friendliness delighted him; if he did not prize the old Judge's so highly, he had the sense to perceive that it was really a more valuable testimonial and brought with it more substantial encouragement. From merely being kind to him the Norton Wards had come to like him, as it seemed, and their liking was backed by Sir Christopher's endorsement. He did not regard these things from a worldly point of view; he did not think of them as stepping-stones, or at any rate only quite indirectly. They would no doubt help him to get rid of, or at least to hold in subjection, his demon of self-distrust; but still more would they comfort him and make him happy. The pleasure he derived from Mrs. Norton Ward's liking, and the Judge's approval, was in quality akin to the gratification which Marie Sarradet's bearing had given him a few nights ago in Regent's Park; just as that had roused in him a keener sense of Marie's attractiveness, so now he glowed with a warm recognition of the merits of his new friends.

Walking home along Oxford Street, he had almost reached the corner of Tottenham Court Road when his complacent musings were interrupted by the sight of a knot of people outside the door of a public-house. It was the sort of group not unusual at half-past eleven o'clock at night—a man, a woman on his arm, a policeman, ten or a dozen interested spectators, very ready with advice as Londoners are. As he drew near, he heard what was passing, though the policeman's tall burly figure was between him and the principal actor in the scene.

"Better do as she says and go 'ome, sir," said the policeman soothingly.

"'Ome, *Sweet* 'Ome!" murmured somebody in tones of fond reminiscence.

"Yes, do now. You don't really want it, you know you don't," urged the lady in her turn.

"Whether I want it or not——"

At the sound of this last voice Arthur started into quick attention and came to a halt. He recognised the full tones, now somewhat thickened, with their faint but unmistakable suggestion of the Cockney twang.

"Whether I want it or not——" The man spoke slowly, with an effort after distinctness which was obvious but not unsuccessful—"I've a right to have it. He's bound to serve the public. I'm—I'm member of the public."

"'Ad enough for two members, *I* should sye," came in comment from the fringe of the group.

"That's it! Go 'ome now," the policeman suggested again, infinitely patient and persuasive.

The man made a sudden move towards the door of the public-house where an official, vulgarly known as the 'chucker out,' stood smiling on the threshold.

"No, sir, you *don't*!" said the policeman, suave but immensely firm, laying a hand on his arm.

"The officer's quite right. Do come along," again urged the lady.

But the movement towards the public-house door, which revealed to Arthur the face of the obstinate lingerer, showed him to the lingerer also—showed Arthur in his evening uniform of tall hat, white scarf, and silk-faced coat to Sidney Barslow in his 'bowler' hat of rakish cut, and his sporting fawn-coloured coat, with the big flower in his buttonhole and his stick with a huge silver knob. The stick shot out—vaguely in Arthur's direction.

"I'm a gentleman, and, what's more, I can prove it. Ask that gentleman—my friend there——"

Arthur's face was a little flushed. His mind was full of those terrible quick visions of his—a scuffle

on the pavement, going bail for Sidney Barslow, giving evidence at the Police Court. "A friend of the prisoner, Mr. Arthur Lisle, Barrister, of Garden Court, Middle Temple"—visions most terrible! But he stood his ground, saying nothing, not moving a limb, and meeting Barslow's look full in the eyes. All the rest were staring at him now. If he remained as he was they would take it as a denial of Barslow's claim to acquaintance. Could he deny it if Barslow challenged him? He answered—No.

But some change of mood came over Sidney Barslow's clouded mind. He let his stick fall back to his side again, and with an angry jerk of his head said:

"Oh, damn it, all right, I'm going! I—I was only pulling your leg."

"That's right now!" applauded the policeman. "You'd better take 'im in a taxi, miss."

"And put a ticket on 'im, in case 'e falls out, miss," some friendly adviser added.

Arthur did not wait to see the policeman's excellent suggestion carried into effect. The moment that Sidney Barslow's eyes were off him, he turned quickly up a by-street, and took a roundabout way home.

He had much to be thankful for. The terrible visions were dissipated. And—he had not run away. Oh, how he had wanted to run away from the danger of being mixed up in that dirty job. He thanked heaven that he had stood his ground and looked Barslow in the face.

But what about the next time they had to look one another in the face—at the Sarradets' in Regent's Park?

CHAPTER IV

A GRATEFUL FRIEND

Marie's remonstrance with her brother was not ill-received—Raymond was too amiable for that—but it was quite unsuccessful. Just emerged from an exhaustive business training on the latest lines at home and abroad, able (as he pointed out in mingled pride and ruefulness) to correspond about perfumes in French, German, Spanish, and Italian, and to talk about them in three of those languages, he declared openly not for a lifetime of leisure but for an hedonistic interval. Further, he favoured a little scattering of money after so much amassing.

"If Pops," he observed, "would only go back to his Balzac, he would see how much harm and sorrow this perpetual money-grubbing causes among the business classes of our beloved France. In England a more liberal spirit prevails, and after a hundred and fifty years we ought to be able to catch it. In fact I have caught it, Marie."

"You have; and you'll catch something else—from Pops—if you don't look out," said Marie, who could not help smiling at the trim, spry, gay little fellow. Like herself, he was dark and lively, but of the two she was the manager, the man of business.

"Besides it does the house good. 'Who's that?' they ask. 'Young Sarradet.' 'What, the scent and soap people?' 'The same.' 'Dashed fine business that!'" He enacted the dialogue with dramatic talent. "As an advertisement I'm worth all my debts, dear sister."

Marie was too much amused to press her point further. "You rather remind me of Bob Sawyer," she remarked. "But, anyhow, be here oftener in the evenings, if you can. That'll go a long way towards pacifying Pops. When you're away, he sits thinking of the money you're spending. Besides, he does like to have you here, you know."

"You tell me when Amabel Osling is coming, and I'll be here."

"I'm glad you like Amabel. She's pretty, isn't she?"

"She's all right. Otherwise I didn't think it was very lively."

"N-no. It was hardly one of our best evenings," Marie admitted reluctantly.

It hadn't been—that first meeting of her circle after Arthur Lisle's dinner party. They had all been there, including Raymond, whose exchanges of wit and chaff with Joe Halliday were generally of themselves enough to make the evening a success. It had not been a success—at least from the moment of Arthur's arrival. Mildred Quain had started off about the party at once; her curiosity concerning the Norton Wards was insatiable—she seemed to be working up a regular cult of them. Marie herself had been benevolently inquisitive too, hoping to hear that Arthur had had a grand time and made a great impression. But the topic had seemed distasteful to Arthur, he tried to get away from it directly; when the persevering Mildred dragged him back, his replies grew short and his manner reserved; he seemed ill at ease. As for Sidney Barslow, as soon as ever Arthur and his party came on the scene, he turned sulky—indecently sulky. It was painful as well as absurd, and it got worse when Joe Halliday, trying (in justice let it be said) to lighten the atmosphere by jocularity, suggested, "And, after it all, I suppose some beautiful lady took you to your humble home in her six-cylinder car?" Arthur answered dryly, with a pointed ignoring of the joke, "I walked home by Oxford Street." Joe, still persevering, asked, "No romantic adventures on the way?" "Nothing out of the common," Arthur replied in a cool hard voice which was very rare in his mouth, but meant, Marie knew, serious displeasure. In fact she was just going to make

some laughing apology for the catechism through which he had been put when Sidney Barslow, who had been glowering worse and worse every minute, suddenly broke out:

"There's an end of the thing, at all events, at last!" And he looked at Arthur, as it seemed to her, with a curious mixture of anger and fear, a sort of snarling defiance.

"It was not I who introduced the subject or was responsible for its continuance," said Arthur, in the iciest of all his cool voices. "That you must do me the justice to admit, Barslow."

Then an awful pause—even Joe gravelled for a joke—and the most obvious clumsy resort to "a little more music"! The strains failed of soothing effect. On the one side a careful but disdainful courtesy, on the other a surly defiance—they persisted all the evening, making everybody uncomfortable and (as Marie shrewdly guessed) inquisitive. This was something much worse, much more pronounced, than mere 'grating.' There was, on Sidney's side at least, an actual enmity; and Arthur, noting it, treated it with contemptuous indifference.

"Have you had a row with Sidney about anything?" she managed to whisper to Arthur.

"No."

"Have you said anything to annoy him, do you think?"

He looked straight into her eyes. "I haven't spoken to him since we were last here."

Sidney she did not venture to approach in confidence; he was altogether too dangerous that night. She did not know the occasion which had fanned a smouldering hostility into flame, which had changed a mere 'grating' of the one on the other, an uncongeniality, into feelings much stronger and more positive. Even had she known it, perhaps she was not well enough versed in the standards and the moods of men to understand all that it carried with it. Sidney Barslow was not particularly ashamed of what had happened to him in itself: in suitable company he would have found it a story he could tell and be sure of a humorous sympathy; there was nothing to be remorseful or miserable about. As long as a man did his work and earned his 'screw' (and Sidney held a good position in a wholesale linen-merchant's business and was doing well) he was entitled to his amusements—if you like, his dissipations—while he was young at all events. If indiscretions marked them, if one sometimes tumbled over the line, that was in the nature of the case. He would not have minded an encounter with Joe Halliday outside that public-house in the least—no, nor even with young Raymond Sarradet, Marie's brother though he was. Nay, he would not much have minded being seen even by Arthur Lisle himself; for if Arthur had been shocked, Sidney would, in all sincerity, have dubbed him a milksop; the man who would be shocked at a thing like that was certainly a milksop. He was not even afraid of Arthur's betraying him to Marie—not because he thought his enemy above that, but because he had an easy confidence that he could put the matter right with Marie, and a strong doubt whether women objected to that sort of thing so much as they were in the habit of pretending; in their hearts they like a man to be a man, Sidney would have told himself for comfort.

The poison lay elsewhere. Under the influence of his liquor and the stress of his plight—wanting to prove to the policeman, to the 'chucker-out,' to the interested bystanders, that he was not a common tap-room frequenter but a 'gentleman'—he had let himself appeal for his warrant of gentility to the man whom he had derided for thinking himself so much (if you please!) a gentleman. Arthur Lisle's acquaintance was to prove to bystanders, policeman, and chucker-out, that he, Sidney Barslow, though drunk and in queer company, was yet a gentleman! And how had the appeal been received? He could not charge Arthur with cutting him, or leaving him in the lurch. He hated far worse the look he had seen in his enemy's eyes as they gazed steadfastly into his—the fastidious repulsion and the high contempt. True, on the sight of them he had withdrawn his appeal; he had preferred to accept defeat and humiliation at the hands of chucker-out and constable; but the fact of the appeal having been made remained with all its damning admission of inferiority. And that look of contempt he had seen again when Arthur Lisle, in answer to Joe Halliday's clumsy jokes, replied in his cool proud voice that, as he walked home by Oxford Street, he had met with "nothing out of the common." He had met a common fellow with a common woman, and, as was common, the common fellow was drunk. With all the sharpness wherewith humiliation pricks a man, with all the keenness wherewith hatred can read the mind of an enemy, he pointed for himself the meaning of Arthur's careless-sounding words.

He was in a rage, not only with Arthur Lisle, but with himself and his luck—which had indeed been somewhat perverse. Lashing himself with these various irritants, he soon produced another sore spot—Marie Sarradet's behaviour. He was an older friend than Arthur; she had, he declared, backed Arthur up in his airy insolence; he swore to himself that he had seen her smile at it. At any rate she had not backed him up; to a man in a rage, or several rages, it was enough—more than enough for a man of his temper, to whom the desire for a woman was the desire for a mastery over her. And in the end he could not believe that that fragile whipper-snapper with his hoity-toity effeminate ways (the point of view is Sidney's) could be weighed in the balance against his own manly handsomeness, his dashing gallantry; why, he knew that he was a conqueror with women—knew it by experience!

Marie and Raymond, Amabel Osling and himself had made up a four to play lawn-tennis on the hard courts at Acton. They had enjoyed their game and their tea. He and Marie had won after a close match, and were in a good humour with themselves. He was forgetting his grievance against her. She liked him playing games; he was a finely built fellow and looked really splendid in his white flannels; if he ordered her about the court like a master, it was a legitimate sway; he knew the game and played well. When, after tea, the other two sauntered off—for an open and unashamed flirtation—Marie had never felt more kindly towards him; she had really forgiven the

bearishness of his behaviour, and was prepared to tell him so after a little lecture, which, by the way, she quite looked forward to giving; for she too was fond of domination. She started leading up to the lecture.

"You seem to have found something since we last met, Sidney. I'm glad of it."

"What do you mean?" he asked carelessly, as he filled his pipe. He did not see her drift.

"Hadn't you mislaid something the other night?" Her dark eyes were dancing with mockery, and her lips twitched.

Now he looked at her suspiciously. "I don't understand."

"You might. I'm referring to your temper."

"I'm not aware that I said anything rude to you. If I did, I apologise."

"I'm not speaking of myself, but of my friends—my guests."

He leant his arm on the table which stood between them. "Meaning Mr. Arthur Lisle?"

"The smoke of your pipe blows in my face when you lean forward like that."

"Sorry!" He laid his pipe down beside him. "Well, the fact is, I'm about fed up with Lisle."

And Arthur Lisle was much in the same case—allowing for the difference of expression—as to Sidney! Marie smiled, but her brow wrinkled. "Sorry you don't like him, but it costs nothing to be polite."

"Well, all I can say is that I shall be very much obliged if you'll ask us on different evenings."

"That's assuming that I'm going to ask you on any evenings at all."

She thought this smart flick of her whip would bring him to reason.

"Oh, perhaps Lisle's going to be there every evening?"

"Any evening that he likes, Pops and I will be very pleased to see him—with or without an invitation." She relented a little; he looked angry and obstinate, but he looked handsome too. "You too, if you won't be silly. Why do you dislike him so much?"

He could not give her the whole reason; he gave what he could. "I see his game. He's always trying to come the swell over me and the rest of us."

"I'm sure he doesn't mean to; it's just——"

"His naturally aristocratic manner?" he sneered.

Marie sat up straight and looked composedly at him. By now she was angry—and she meant to hurt. "That's exactly it, Sidney," she said, "and it's a pity everybody hasn't got it."

She did hurt sorely. He had no code to keep him from hitting back, and his wrath was fierce. "Where did you learn so much about aristocratic manners? Behind the counter?"

She flushed hotly; tears came in her eyes. He saw what he had done, and was touched to a sudden remorse.

"Oh, I say, Marie, I didn't mean——!"

"I shan't forget that," she said. "Never!"

He shrugged his shoulders and stuck his pipe back in his mouth. He was ashamed, but obstinate still. "You brought it on yourself," he grumbled.

"Yes, I forgot that I wasn't talking to a gentleman."

He made one more effort after reconciliation. "Look here, Marie, you know what I think of you ——"

"Yes, I do—you've just told me."

"Damnation!" he muttered, pulling at his pipe. Marie, looking carefully past him, began to put on her gloves. Thus Amabel and Raymond found them—with things obviously very wrong. Amabel diagnosed an offer and a refusal, but Raymond thought there must be even more behind his sister's stormy brow and clouded eyes. The journey back was not cheerful.

Marie was indeed cut to the quick. Even to herself it was strange how deeply she was wounded. The Sarradets had never been ashamed of the shop; rather they had taken an honourable pride in it and in the growth of its fortunes from generation to generation. Yet Sidney Barslow's gibe about the counter was to her now unforgivable. It brought into coarse and vivid relief her secret doubts and fears. It made her ask whether she, having made a friend of the man who had used a taunt like that, must not have something about her to justify it. It set her on fire to put an utter end to her friendship and association with Sidney Barslow—and thereby to prove to herself that, whatever her manners might be they were at least too good for such company as his.

Hitherto pretty equally balanced between the two young men, or at all events wistfully anxious that friendship with Arthur should not make impossible her old and pleasant comradeship with Sidney—in whom she found so much that she liked—she became now Arthur's furious partisan. With him and his cause she identified herself. She declared that it was purely for his sake, and not at all in the interest of her own domination and authority, that she had rebuked Sidney, and for his sake solely that she had suffered insult. By a natural turn of feeling she asked in her heart for a reward from him, a recognition of her championship, gratitude to her for having preferred

him to his would-be rival; if he were not at least a little pleased and proud, she would feel disappointment and humiliation.

But he would be. And why? Because that was the right thing for him to be, and now in her eyes, at this moment, he could do no wrong. Sidney was all wrong, therefore Arthur must be all right. She could not bring herself to doubt it. And, being all right, he must do and feel all the right things. So he would—when he knew what she had done and suffered for him. Her heart cried out that somehow (as delicately as possible, of course) he must be made to know, to know the full extent of her service and her sacrifice; he must know the insult she had received; and he must consider it as great and wanton an insult as she did.

So her feelings formulated their claim upon him, with an instinctive cunning. It was a claim to which no chivalrous-minded man could be insensible; it was one that would appeal with commanding force to Arthur Lisle's impulsive generosity.

"For you I have quarrelled with my old friend—for you I have endured insult." What could he answer save that in him she should find a better friend, that his appreciation should efface the insult?

"Don't be afraid to come. There will be nobody here that you don't like this time." With these words her next invitation to Arthur Lisle ended.

He read them with a quick grasp of her meaning—of the essential part of it at least. She was on his side! He was glad. Neither for his own sake, nor for the sake of the idea that he had of her, would he easily have endured that she should be on Sidney Barslow's side and against him. Although she did not know what he knew, and had not seen what he had seen, her instincts and her taste were right! He looked forward eagerly to letting her perceive, in some way or other, that he recognised this, to congratulating her somehow on it, to sealing the pact of a natural alliance between them. How he would do this, or how far he might seem to go in the course of doing it, or what further implications might be involved in such a bond between man and maid, his young blood and his generous impulses did not pause to ask. It was the thing to do—and he wanted to do it.

CHAPTER V

THE TENDER DIPLOMATIST

The coming of the Easter legal vacation set Arthur free for the time from professional hopes and fears. He was due on a visit to his mother and sister at Malvern, but excused himself at the last moment. It was not in him to leave London. The Temple indeed he forsook, but he abode in his lodgings and spent his spare time with the Sarradets. Amabel Osling was staying with them, and Raymond was now in close attendance on her. There were two young couples, then, ready for lawn-tennis, for theatres, for concerts, or any other diversion. Yet pleasantest of all were the walks in Regent's Park on the offdays, when nothing special had been arranged, but Arthur would happen to stroll up to the Broad Walk, and Marie would chance to be giving her dog a run. Then they would saunter about together, or sit on a seat in the spring sunshine, talking of all manner of things—well, except of the particular form which Sidney Barslow's rudeness had taken. Somehow, in the end, Marie never could bring herself to tell him that and ask him to be indignant about it. She left the enormity vague and undefined; it was really none the less effective left like that, just as provocative of reprobation for the sinner and sympathy for the ill-used friend. And it was safer to leave it like that; she could never rid herself of the fear that the actual thing, if revealed, might appear to Arthur rude indeed—rough, ill-mannered, as much of all this as one could conceive—but not so overwhelmingly absurd and monstrous as it ought to seem, as the demands of her uneasy heart required that he should find it.

For she could hardly believe in what looked now like coming to pass. She had known him for a long time—more than a year—as a good friend but rather a reserved one; cordial and kind, but keeping always a certain distance, actually, if without intention, maintaining a barrier round his inner self, refusing to abandon the protective aloofness of a proud and sensitive nature. Was he changing from this to the opposite extreme—to that most open, intimate, exposed, and unprotected creature, a lover? Well as she had known him, she had not thought of him as that. But her mind fastened on the idea eagerly; it appealed to more than one side of her nature.

"As a rule I just can't talk about myself," he said once. "How is it that I can to you?"

"It's because I love you, and in your heart you know it," she wanted to say, but she answered, laughing, "I've always been rather a good listener."

"If you tell most people a single thing about yourself, they bombard you with a dozen silly questions. Now you never do that."

"That's because I'm afraid of you, if you only knew it," she wanted to say, but she answered merrily, "I find out more by my way in the end, don't I?"

For every step forward his feelings had taken, hers had taken ten. She knew it and was not ashamed; she gloried in it. From the moment she had come over to his side, making herself his champion and asking for his gratitude in return, her heart had brooked no compromise. Hers was

a mind quick of decision, prompt in action. To romance she brought the qualities of business. A swift rush of feeling had carried her to the goal; she watched him now following in her steps, and was tremulously careful not to anticipate by an iota the stages he had yet to pass. She marvelled that she had not loved him from the beginning, and almost convinced herself that she had. She could scarcely persuade herself to accept even now the signs of his nascent love.

Thus in truth, though all unknown to him, she did the wooing. Her answer was ready before his question. She watched and waited with a passivity that was to a man of his disposition her best lure. Some of this fine caution she learnt from her observation of him, and some of it from Sidney Barslow's taunt. She subdued her natural coquetry lest, even in eyes the most unfriendly and malicious, it should seem forwardness. She gave always just a little, little less than his words and eyes asked. Schooling herself after this fashion, modelling her behaviour to what she conceived to be his ideals, she sought to win him. If she succeeded she would achieve not only her heart's desire, but a great triumph over those disturbing doubts. His approval would, she felt, set on her the stamp that she longed to wear—the social diploma to which she aspired. A fine slap in the face for Sidney Barslow it would be, for instance!

Arthur's generous impulse, the desire to show himself a warm and grateful friend to his champion, was merged now in a great and absorbing contentment. It prevented him from considering how an engagement and a marriage would consort with his prospects and his career; it narrowed his vision of his own life and mind to the present moment. He had got what he had been pining for—that intimate and (so to say) ministering sympathy which a man perhaps can get, and certainly can ask, from a woman only. That had been a need so great that its satisfaction seemed to satisfy all the needs of his being, and deluded him into thinking that all his instincts and aspirations asked no more than this, that his keen appetite for beauty could be fed on her vivacious prettiness, that all his impulses, wayward, fanciful, sometimes extravagant, could be lulled to sleep by the spell of her shrewd and pleasant common sense. It made him forget that the prime function of a lover and his supreme expression lie in giving, and that the woman truly makes the man in love with her when she makes him give all he has and think that he is giving brass for gold. But if this it is to be a lover, Arthur Lisle was no lover now; if this it is to be a lover, Marie Sarradet had never seen and scarce imagined one.

But the spring sunshine, the impulses of youth, the ministering sympathy blinded his eyes. He seemed to have all because he liked so much that which he had. Gaily and happily, with that fine gallantry which she so admired, on he came, step by step. She grew secure.

By now father and brother were on the alert. They had canvassed the matter in all its bearings. Raymond was Arthur's enthusiastic adherent. Old Mr. Sarradet affected reserve and doubt; he complained that the suitor was far from rich. But in his heart he was delighted at the prospect. He admired Arthur, he believed in his abilities, he thought the marriage would be a "step up" for his darling daughter—and perhaps for her family. Above all he saw the time draw near when he should enjoy the greatest pleasure that he had to look forward to in life—surprising Marie by the handsome dimensions of her dowry. He hugged the thought of it; he loved her, and he knew she was a good woman of business. It would be a great moment when she saw in him, at one and the same moment, a more munificent father and a cleverer man of business than ever she had thought. Incidentally the disclosure might cause Master Raymond to realise what very considerable things he stood to lose if he did not mind what he was about. The old fellow had no real thought of disinheriting his son, but he loved the power his money gave him, and would now and again flourish the sword that he would have been most loth to use.

So all things promised bravely—Marie, the tender diplomatist, held a winning hand and was playing it well. Leave her to the skill that her heart taught her, and the game was won!

Among the accidents of life are relatives appurtenant to but ordinarily outside of the family circle. Mr. Sarradet owned one—an elder sister—in his eyes, by early memory and tradition, exceptionally endowed with the knowledge of the way to look after girls, and the proper things to be done in the interest of their dignity and virtue. She came up from Manchester, where she lived, to have her teeth seen to—not that there were not excellent dentists in Manchester, but her father had always gone to Mr. Mandells of Seymour Street and she had a fancy to go to Mr. Mandells's son (of Seymour Street still)—and stayed with her brother from Friday to Tuesday. Having seen what she saw, and had her doubts, and come to her own conclusions, she sat up late on Monday night, sat up till Arthur Lisle had departed and Marie was between the sheets, and even Raymond had yawned himself on to bed; and then she said abruptly to her brother Mr. Sarradet:

"It's a settled thing, I suppose, though it's not announced yet?"

Mr. Sarradet passed his hand over his hair-brush of a head, and pulled his moustache perplexedly. "I suppose it is," he answered lamely, quite conscious that Mrs. Veltheim possessed knowledge and commanded deference, but conscious also that, up to now, matters had gone on very well without her.

"You suppose!" said the lady. The two words carried home to a conscience hitherto guiltily easy. But Mrs. Veltheim left nothing to chance; she rammed the charge in. "If dear Marie had a mother!"

She alarmed the cautious old *bourgeois*—to the point of protesting that he felt no alarm whatever.

"He's a gentleman." He took a sip at his toddy. "No girl in the world has more self-respect." Another sip ended in "Perfect confidence!" vaguely murmured.

"Young men are young men."

"Not at all! I don't believe it of him for a minute." His protest was against the insinuation which even an identical proposition may carry.

"I rescued my Harriet just in time!"

"Damn your Harriet, and I wish you'd go back to Manchester!" It was not what he said to his respected sister. "Cases differ," was the more parliamentary form his answer took.

But the seed was sown before Mrs. Veltheim did go back to Manchester. It germinated in the cautious suspicious soul of the old shopkeeper, so trustful of a man's credit till the breath of a suspicion blew upon it, then so acute to note every eddying current of the air. He grew minded to confront Arthur Lisle with the attitude of Mrs. Veltheim—a lady for whom Arthur, on the strength of one evening's acquaintance, had conceived a most profound aversion.

She was a fat woman—broad, heavy, fair and florid, married to an exceedingly prosperous German. To Mr. Sarradet her opinion was, like her person, weighty; not always agreeable, but never unimportant. To Arthur she was already—before ever he had conceived of her as having or being entitled to have an opinion about him, his sentiments, or his intentions—an appreciable drawback, though not a serious obstacle, to the alliance which he was contemplating. He was, in fine, extremely glad that she and her husband, whom he defined and incarnated with all his imagination's power of vividness, lived in Manchester. If they too had dwelt in Regent's Park, it would not have been the same place to him. Collateral liabilities would have lurked round every corner.

By now, and notwithstanding a transitory disturbance created by the revelation of Mrs. Veltheim, Arthur's mind had subconsciously chosen its course; but emotionally he was not quite ready. His feelings waited for a spark to set them in a blaze—such a spark as might come any moment when he was with Marie, some special note of appeal sounded by her, some quick intuition of him or his mood, raising his admiration and gratitude, even some especially pretty aspect of her face suddenly striking on his sense of beauty. Any one of these would serve, but one of them was needed to change his present contentment into an impulse towards something conceived as yet more perfect. The tender shrewd diplomatist divined pretty well how things stood; she would not hurry or strive, that way danger lay; she waited, securely now and serenely, for the divine chance, the happy coincidence of opportunity and impulse. It was bound to come, and to come now speedily. Alas, she did not know that clumsy hands had been meddling with her delicate edifice!

Two days after Mrs. Veltheim had gone back to Manchester, old Sarradet left his place of business early, travelled by omnibus from Cheapside to the corner of Bloomsbury Street, and presented himself at the door of Arthur's lodgings. Arthur was at home; Marie had told him that she would not be able to meet him in Regent's Park that afternoon, as some shopping business called her elsewhere, and he was lounging through the hours, not (as it happened, and it does happen sometimes even when a man is in love) thinking about her much, but rather about that problem of his legal career which the waning of the vacation brought again to his mind. The appearance of Mr. Sarradet—who had never before honoured him with a visit—came as something of a surprise.

"As I was passing your corner, I thought I'd look in and see if you were coming up to our place this afternoon," Mr. Sarradet explained. "Because, if so, we might walk together."

Arthur said that he understood that Marie would be out, and therefore had not proposed to pay his friends a visit that day.

"Out, is she? Ah, yes!" He smiled knowingly. "You know what she's doing better than her father does!" He was walking about the little room, looking at Arthur's pictures, photographs, and other small possessions. "Well, you'll be coming again soon, I expect?"

"I expect so, if you'll have me," said Arthur, smiling.

Mr. Sarradet took up a photograph. "That's a nice face!"

"It's my mother, Mr. Sarradet."

"Your mother, is it? Ah, well now! And she lives at——? Let me see! You did mention it."

"At Malvern—she and my sister."

"Your sister? Ah, yes! Unmarried, isn't she? Have you no other brothers or sisters?"

Under these questions—and more followed, eliciting a good deal of information about his family and its circumstances—Arthur's face gradually assumed its distinctively patient expression. The patience was very closely akin to endurance—in fact, to boredom. Why did the fussy old fellow worry him like that? Instinctively he hardened himself against Sarradet—against Sarradet's implied assertion of a right to ask him all these questions. Perhaps he knew that this resentment was not very reasonable. He felt it, none the less. To put him in any way to the question, to a test or a trial, was so entirely contrary to what had been Marie's way.

"And you're practising at the Bar, Mr. Lisle, eh?"

The infusion of obstinacy in the patience grew stronger. "I'm what is commonly called a briefless barrister."

Now old Sarradet knew that—and did not mind it under the circumstances. But the thought of that dowry was too much for him. He could not resist a little flourish. "Briefless! Oh, come, don't

say that!" He pursed up his lips and shook his head humorously.

"It's unfortunately the case, Mr. Sarradet. I hope it won't always be so, of course."

"We must hope that, we must all hope that!" said Sarradet, rubbing his hands slowly together. "And in any case we none of us know what fortune has in store for us, do we?" He smiled, looking at Arthur with an interrogative air. He thought he had given the young man a lead, a good cue on which to speak. Arthur said nothing, and Sarradet's smile gradually vanished, being replaced by a look of some perplexity. He did not know how to go on; Mrs. Veltheim had told him what to do but had not told him how to do it. There was an awkward silence. Sarradet had taken up his hat and stood in the middle of the room, fingering it and eyeing Arthur with an air that seemed almost furtive. "Well, I must be going," he said at last.

Arthur moved towards the door of the room and opened it. Sarradet stepped into the hall, saying, "Perhaps you'll be looking in on us to-night?"

"Thanks awfully, but I've arranged to go to the theatre with a man to-night."

"To-morrow then?" Sarradet's tone sounded persistent.

Arthur had meant to look in to-morrow. It had been a pleasant prospect. Why was the old fellow making an obligation, a duty, of it?

"Yes, I'll come to-morrow," he said, rather curtly.

"Ah, that's right, that's right!" Arthur had opened the hall door by now. Sarradet took his hand and pressed it hard. "That'll be good news for Marie, won't it?" He had at last got a little nearer to what Mrs. Veltheim wanted.

"I'm very much flattered by your putting it like that." Arthur was still distant and defensive.

But Sarradet was desperate now—he must get out what he wanted to say before the door was shut on him. "Oh, nonsense! Come, Mr. Lisle, as man to man, we understand one another?"

The question was out at last. If he had put it a quarter of an hour earlier, Arthur Lisle would have answered it to his satisfaction, however little he relished its being put. But now it was not fated to have an answer. For on the very moment of its being put, there came interruption in a form which made the continuance of this momentous conversation impossible.

A barouche with a pair of fine bay horses, a barouche on Cee-springs, sumptuously appointed, clattered up the street and to the common amazement of the two men stopped at the door. The footman sprang down from the box and, touching his hat to a lady who occupied the carriage, waited for her instructions. But she paid no heed to him. She leant over the side of the carriage and looked at the two men for a moment. Sarradet took off his hat. Arthur Lisle just stared at the vision, at the entire vision, the lady, the carriage, the footman—the whole of it.

The lady's face broke into a bright smile of recognition.

"I came to call on Mr. Arthur Lisle. You must be Arthur, aren't you?" she said.

No, there was no possibility of Mr. Sarradet's getting his question answered now.

CHAPTER VI

A TIMELY DISCOVERY

When Arthur ran down the step and across the pavement, to take the hand which his visitor held out to him over the carriage door, Mr. Sarradet bowed politely, put his hat on, and turned on his heel. He was consumed with curiosity, but he had no excuse for lingering. He walked up Bloomsbury Street and along the east side of Bedford Square. But then, instead of pursuing a north-westerly course towards his home, he turned sharply to the right and, slackening his pace, strolled along Montague Place in the direction of Russell Square. He went about twenty yards, then turned, strolled back to the corner of Bedford Square and peered round it. He repeated these movements three or four times, very slowly; they consumed perhaps six or seven minutes. His last inspection showed the carriage still at the door, though neither the lady nor Arthur was visible. Evidently she was paying a call, as she had intimated; no telling how long it might last! "Well, I must go home," thought Mr. Sarradet, as he strolled slowly towards the east once more. He turned and walked briskly back. Just as he reached again the corner from which he had taken his observation, he made a sudden backward jump. He was afraid that he was caught! For the barouche dashed by him at a rapid trot, and in it sat the lady and Arthur Lisle. They did not see him; their heads were turned towards one another; they appeared to be engrossed in a lively conversation. The carriage turned westward, across Bedford Square; Sarradet watched it till it disappeared round the corner into Tottenham Court Road.

"That's quick work!" thought Mr. Sarradet; and in truth, if (as the visitor's words implied) she had never seen Arthur Lisle before, the acquaintance was going forward apace. Who could she be? He was vaguely troubled that Arthur Lisle should have—or make—a friend like that. The barouche somehow depressed him; perhaps it put him a little out of conceit with the dimensions of that precious dowry; it looked so rich. And then there had been the reserve, the distance, in Arthur's manner, his refusal to follow up leads and to take cues, and the final fact that the

important question had (even though it were by accident) gone unanswered. All these things worked together to dash Mr. Sarradet's spirits.

He told Marie about his visit to Arthur. She was rather surprised at a sudden fancy like that (for so he represented it) taking hold of him, but her suspicions were not roused. When he went on to describe the arrival of the other visitor she listened with natural and eager interest. But the old fellow, full of his perplexities, made a false step.

"She was in the house nearly ten minutes, and then—what do you think, Marie?—they drove away together!"

"In the house ten minutes? Where were you all that time?"

"I was—er—strolling along."

"You must have strolled pretty slowly. Where did they overtake you, Pops?"

He grew rather red. "I can't remember exactly——" he began lamely.

She knew him so well; his confused manner, telling that he had something to conceal, could not escape her notice.

"I believe you waited round the corner to see what happened! Why did you spy on him like that?"

"I don't see any particular harm in being a little curious about——"

But she interrupted him. His spying after the carriage threw suspicion on his motives for his visit too. "Didn't you really go and see Mr. Lisle about anything in particular?"

"Anything in particular, my dear? What do you mean? I asked him to drop in to-morrow——"

"Did you talk about me?"

"Oh, well, you were mentioned, of course."

She leant her arm on the mantelpiece and looked down at him gravely. He read a reproachful question in her glance, and fidgeted under it. "Have you been meddling?" was what her gravely enquiring eyes asked. "Meddling as well as spying, Pops?"

He was roused to defend himself. "You've got no mother, Marie, and——"

"Ah!" she murmured, as a quick flash of enlightenment came. That was Aunt Louisa's phrase! She saw where it came from in a minute; it had always supplied Mrs. Veltheim with a much desired excuse for interfering. She went on in a hard voice—she was very angry—"Did you ask Mr. Lisle his intentions?"

"Of course not. I—I only took the opportunity of finding out something about his people, and—and so on. Really, I think you're very unreasonable, Marie, to object——" and he wandered or maundered on about his paternal rights and duties.

She let him go on. She had no more to say about it—no more that she could say, without revealing her delicate diplomacy. She would do that to nobody alive; she had never stated it explicitly even to herself. There she left the affair, left the last word and a barren show of victory to her father. How much mischief he had done she would find out later—perhaps to-morrow, if Arthur Lisle came. But would he—now? It was the effect of her father's meddling she feared, not that matter of the lady's visit. She knew that he had other friends than themselves. Why shouldn't one of them come and take him for a drive? It was Mrs. Norton Ward, very likely. Her quarrel with her father about his meddling even prevented her from asking what the visitor was like; whatever he might do, she at least would show no vulgar curiosity.

Yet it was the coincidence of the visit with the meddling that did the mischief. Without the first, the second would have resulted in nothing worse than a temporary annoyance, a transitory shock to Arthur's feelings, which a few days' time and Marie's own tact would have smoothed over. As it was, his distaste for old Sarradet's inquisition, an angry humiliation at having the pistol held to his head, a romantic abhorrence of such a way of dealing with the tenderest and most delicate matters, a hideous yet obstinate suspicion that Marie might be privy to the proceeding—all these set his feelings just in time for the unexpected visit.

The visit had been delightful, and delight is an unsettling thing. As Mrs. Godfrey Lisle—or Bernadette, as she bade him call her—purred about his room (so he put it to himself), still more when she declared for sunshine and carried him off to drive with her—in Regent's Park too!—he had felt a sudden lift of the spirit, an exaltation and expansion of feeling. The world seemed wider, its possibilities more various; it was as though walls had been torn down from around him —walls of his own choice and making, no doubt, but walls all the same. This sensation was very vague; it was little more than that the whole atmosphere of his existence seemed fresher, more spacious and more pungent. He owned ruefully that the barouche, the Cee-springs, the bay horses and the liveries, might have had something to do with his pleasure; he knew his susceptibility to the handsome things of material life—the gauds and luxuries—and ever feared to catch himself in snobbishness. But the essential matter did not lie there; his company was responsible for that—Bernadette, and the way she had suddenly appeared, and whisked him off as it were on a magic carpet for a brief journey through the heavens; it seemed all too brief.

"I came as soon as ever I could," she told him. "I got Esther Norton Ward's letter about you after we'd gone to Hilsey for Easter, and we got back only yesterday. But I had terrible work to get leave to come. I had to go down on my knees almost! Cousin Arthur, you're in disgrace, and when you come to see us, you must abase yourself before Godfrey. The Head of the House is hurt because you didn't call!"

"I know. It was awfully wrong of me, but——"

"I understand all about it. But Godfrey's a stickler for his rights. However Sir Oliver and I managed to bring him round ("Who's Sir Oliver?" asked Arthur inwardly), and when you've eaten humble pie, it will be all right. Do you like humble pie, Arthur?"

"No, I don't."

"No more do I." But she was smiling still, and he thought it was little of that stuff she would have to consume. "You see, you made quite an impression on Esther. Oh, and Sir Christopher came down for a week-end, and he was full of your praises too." She put on a sudden air of gravity. "I drove up to your door in a state of considerable excitement, and I had a momentary fear that the fat man with the black moustache was you. However it wasn't—so that's all right." She did not ask who the fat man really was; Arthur was glad—all that could come later.

In fact she asked him no questions about himself. She welcomed him with the glee of a child who has found a new toy or a new playmate. There was no hint of flirtation, no effort to make a conquest; a thing like that seemed quite out of her way. There was no pose, either of languor or of gush. The admiration of his eyes, which he could not altogether hide, she either did not notice or took as a matter of course—something universal and therefore, from a personal point of view, not important. On the other hand he caught her looking at him with interest and critically. She saw that she was caught and laughed merrily over it. "Well, I do feel rather responsible for you, you know," she said in self-defence.

Life does do funny things all of a sudden! He drove with her past the Sarradets' house. He seemed, for the moment, a world away from it. They drove together for an hour; they arranged that he should come to lunch on a day to be fixed after consultation with Godfrey—it appeared that Godfrey liked to be consulted—and then she set him down in the Marylebone Road. When he tried, rather stammeringly, to thank her, she shook her head with a smile that seemed a little wistful, saying "No, I think it's I who ought to thank you; you've given me an afternoon's holiday—all to myself!" She looked back over her shoulder and waved her hand to him again as she turned down Harley Street and passed out of sight. When she was gone, the vision of her remained with him, but vaguely and rather elusively—a memory of grey eyes, a smooth rich texture of skin, mobile changeable lips, fair wavy hair—these in a setting of the richest apparel; an impression of something very bright and very fragile, carefully bestowed in sumptuous wrappings.

He went to the Sarradets' the next evening, as he had been bidden, but he went with laggard steps. He could not do what seemed to be expected of him there—not merely because it was expected, though that went for something considerable, thanks to his strain of fastidious obstinacy, but because it had become impossible for him to—his feelings sought a word and found only a very blunt and ungracious one—to tie himself up like that. His great contentment was impaired and could no longer absorb him. His sober scheme of happiness was crumbling. His spirit was for adventure. Finality had become suddenly odious—and marriage presents itself as finality to those who are not yet married. If he had not been ready for the plunge before, now he was a thousand times less ready.

The evening belied the apprehensions he had of it. There was a merry party—Mildred Quain, Amabel Osling, Joe Halliday, and half-a-dozen other young folk. And Mr. Sarradet was out! Dining at his club with some old cronies, Marie explained. There were games and music, plenty of chaff and a little horseplay. There was neither the opportunity nor the atmosphere for sentiment or sentimental problems. In gratitude to fate for this, and in harmony with what was his true inward mood behind and deeper than his perplexity, Arthur's spirits rose high; he chaffed and sported with the merriest. Marie was easy, cordial, the best of friends with him—not a hint of anything except just that special and pleasant intimacy of friendship which made them something more to one another than the rest of the company could be to either of them. She was just as she had always been—and he dismissed his suspicion. She had known nothing at all of Mr. Sarradet's inquisition; she was in no way to blame for it. And if she were innocent, why, then, was not he innocent also? His only fault could lie in having seemed to her to mean what he had not meant. If he had not seemed to her to mean it, where was his fault,—and where his obligation? But if he acquitted Marie, and was quite disposed to acquit himself, he nursed his grudge against old Sarradet for his bungling attempt to interfere between friends who understood one another perfectly.

Marie watched him, without appearing to watch, and was well content. Her present object was to set him completely at his ease again—to get back to where they were before Mrs. Veltheim interfered and her father blundered. If she could do that, all would be well; and she thought that she was doing it. Had Mrs. Veltheim and Mr. Sarradet been the only factors in the case, she would probably have proved herself right; for she was skilful and tenacious, and no delicacy of scruple held her back from trying to get what she wanted, even when what she wanted happened to be a man to marry. There that toughness of hers served her ends well.

When he said good-night, he was so comfortable about the whole position, so friendly to her and so conscious of the pleasure she had given him in the last few weeks, that he said with genuine ruefulness, "Back to the Temple to-morrow! I shan't be able to play about so much!"

"No, you must work," she agreed. "But try to come and see us now and then, when you're not too busy."

"Oh, of course I shall—and I'm not at all likely to be busy. Only one has to stop in that hole—just in case."

"I mean—just when you feel like it. Don't make a duty of it. Just when you feel inclined for a riot like this, or perhaps for a quiet talk some afternoon."

This was all just what he wanted to hear, exactly how he wanted the thing to be put.

Yes, but Mr. Sarradet would not always be so obliging as to be out! The thought of Mr. Sarradet, whom he had really forgotten, suddenly recurred to him unpleasantly.

"That's what I like—our quiet talks," she went on. "But you've only to say the word, and we'll have company for you."

Her tone was light, playful, chaffing. He answered in the same vein. "I'll send my orders about that at least twelve hours beforehand."

"Thank you, my lord," and, laughing, she dropped him a curtsey.

He left them still at their frolic and went home rather early. He had enjoyed himself, but, all the same, his dominant sense was one of relief, and not merely from the obligation which officious hands had sought to thrust on him, regardless of the fact that he was not ready to accept it and might never be. It was relief from the sense of something that he himself had been doing, or been in danger of doing, to his own life—a thing which he vaguely defined as a premature and ignorant disposal of that priceless asset. Together with the youthful vanity which this feeling about his life embodied, there came to him also a moment of clear-sightedness, in the light of which he perceived the narrow limits of his knowledge of the world, of life, even of himself. He saw—the word is too strong, rather he felt somehow—that he had never really wanted Marie Sarradet to share, much less to be the greatest factor in, that precious, still unexplored life; he had really only wanted to talk to her about it, with her to speculate about it, to hear from her how interesting it was and might become. He wanted that still from her. Or at all events from somebody? From her or another? He put that question behind him—it was too sceptical. He wanted still her interest, her sympathy. But he wanted something else even more—freedom to find, to explore, to fulfil his life.

So it was that Mr. Arthur Lisle, by a fortunate combination of circumstances on which he certainly had no right to reckon, found out, just in time, that after all he had never been in love—unless indeed with his own comely image, flatteringly reflected in a girl's admiring eyes.

Poor tender diplomatist! But possibly she too might make her own discoveries.

CHAPTER VII

ALL OF A FLUTTER

"Bernadette's got a new toy, Esther."

"I know it," said Mrs. Norton Ward, handing her visitor a cup of tea.

"Do you mean that you know the fact or that you're acquainted with the individual?"

"The latter, Judith. In fact I sent him to her."

"Well, it was she who went to him really, though Godfrey made some trouble about it. He thought the young man ought to have called first. However they got round him."

"They? Who?"

"Why, Bernadette and Oliver Wyse, of course. And he came to lunch. But Godfrey was quite on his high horse at first—stroked his beard, and dangled his eye-glass, and looked the other way when he was spoken to—you know the poor old dear when he's like that? Luckily the young man could tell Leeds from Wedgwood, and that went a long way towards putting matters right. Godfrey quite warmed to him at last."

"We like him very much, and I hope you did—even if you won't admit it. He's got a room in Frank's chambers, you know."

"I didn't speak more than six words to him—he was up at the other end of the table by Bernadette. But I liked the look of him rather. Of course he was all of a flutter."

"Oh, I daresay," smiled Esther. "But I thought we ought to risk that—and Sir Christopher felt quite strongly about it."

Judith Arden appeared to reflect for a moment. "Well, I think he ought to be," she said judicially. "I wouldn't give much for a man who didn't get into a flutter over Bernadette, at first anyhow. She must seem to them rather—well, irresistible."

"She's wonderfully"—Esther Norton Ward sought for a word too—"radiant, I mean, isn't she?"

"And there isn't a bit of affectation about her. She just really does enjoy it all awfully."

"All what?"

"Why, being irresistible and radiant, of course."

"That's looking at it entirely from her point of view."

"What point of view do you suppose she looks at it from? That is, if she ever looks at it at all. And

why not? They ought to be able to look after themselves—or keep away."

"I really think you're a very fair-minded girl," laughed Esther. "Very impartial."

"You have to be—living with them as much as I do."

"Do you like it?"

Judith smiled. "The situation is saved just by my not having to do it. If I had to do it for my bread-and-butter I should hate it like poison. But, thank heaven, I've four hundred a year, and if I spend the summer with them, it's because Godfrey and Margaret want me. The winter I keep for myself—Switzerland part of the time, then Rome, or Florence. So I'm quite independent, you see. I'm always a visitor. Besides, of course, nobody could be more gracious than Bernadette; graciousness is part of being irresistible."

"I really do think that being pretty improves people," said Esther.

"Well, as far as I can see, without it there wouldn't *be* any Bernadette," Judith remarked, and then laughed gently at her own extravagance. "At any rate, she'd be bound to turn into something absolutely different. Something like me even, perhaps!" She laughed again, a low, pleasant, soft laugh, rather in contrast with the slightly brusque tone and the satiric vein which marked her speech. The laugh seemed to harmonise with and to belong to her eyes, which were dark, steady, and reflective; the tone and manner to fall into line with the pertness of her nose, with its little jut upwards, and with the scornful turn of her upper lip. Her figure and movements perhaps helped the latter impression too; she inclined to thinness, and her gestures were quick and sometimes impatient.

"Come, you're not so bad," said Esther with her pleasant cordial candour. "Now I'm quite insignificant."

"No, you're not. You've got the grand manner. I heard Godfrey say so."

Esther laughed both at the compliment and at the authority vouched in support of it.

"Oliver Wyse was at lunch too on the occasion, was he? How is he getting on?"

"Sir Oliver is still his usual agreeable, composed, competent, and, I'm inclined to think, very wilful self."

"Patient, though?" The question came with a mischievous glance. Judith's retort was ironic, both with eyes and tongue.

"I permit myself any amount of comment on character but no conjecture as to facts. That's the distinction between studying human nature and gossiping, Esther."

"Don't snub me! And the distinction's rather a fine one."

"No, gossip's all right for you, living outside the house. I live so much inside it that I think it wouldn't be fair in me. And above all, owing to the footing on which I'm there—as I've told you—I am emphatically not a watch-dog."

"Where's the child?"

"She's down at Hilsey—with the old housekeeper Mrs. Gates—by doctor's orders."

"Again! Have you any comment to make on the doctor's character?"

"I think you're being malicious. It's really better for the child to be in the country. We're very busy, all of us, and very gay—a bustle all the time. If she were here, she'd only be with a nurse in the Park or in the nursery. And we're only just back from three weeks at Hilsey ourselves."

"Yes, I think I was being malicious," Esther admitted. "I suppose we're all jealous of Bernadette in our hearts, and talk like cats about her! Well, you don't!"

"It would be ungrateful of me. She affords me a very great deal of pleasure. Besides, she's my aunt."

"Well—by marriage."

"Oh yes, entirely by marriage," Miss Arden agreed with one of her fleeting smiles. She implied that no other form of auntship would be, as the advertisements say, "entertained" by Bernadette. "And even as to that I have, by request, dropped the titles, both for her and Godfrey," she added.

Though Judith Arden was only just out of her teens, she was older in mind and ways; she ranked herself, and was accepted, as contemporary with women in the middle and later twenties, like Bernadette and Esther Norton Ward. She had had to face the world practically by herself. An epidemic of fever in an Italian town had carried off father and mother when she was fifteen. She had got them buried, herself quarantined and back to England, unaided, as she best could. That was a developing experience. At home she came under the guardianship of her uncle, Godfrey Lisle, which was much the same thing as coming under her own. Godfrey was not practical; the care of a growing girl was hopelessly beyond him. Judith put herself to school at Paris; that finished with, she tried Cambridge for a term, and found it too like going back to school. She kept house for a while with an old school-comrade, an art-student, in Paris. The friend married, and she was by herself again. A visit to Hilsey led to the sort of semi-attachment to the Godfrey Lisle household which she described to Esther; from the position of a "poor relation" she was saved by her four hundred pounds a year—her mother's portion; the late Mr. Arden, author of books on art, and travel in the interests of art, had left nothing but some personal debts behind. To the maturity of her world-experience there was one exception; she had never been in love; the

transitory flirtations of ball-rooms and studios had left her amused but heart-whole.

Her guardian had come by degrees to let himself be looked after by her a good deal. The inheritor of an old family estate worth some ten thousand pounds a year, Godfrey Lisle had been bred for a country squire, a local man of affairs, or (given aptitude for the wider sphere) a politician; such were the traditions of the Lisles of Hilsey. In him they found no continuance. He was a shy quiet man, tall but rather awkward in person, and near-sighted; his face was handsome and refined and, when he was not embarrassed (he often was), his manner was pleasant, if too soft. But he did not like society, and was shy with strangers; he would fumble with the black ribbon from which his glasses hung, and look the other way, as Judith had described. He was fond of beautiful things—pictures, china, furniture—but had not the energy to make himself a real amateur of any of them. His nature was affectionate—calmly affectionate, and the affections were constant. Once, and once only, he had blazed into a flame of feeling—when he courted Bernadette and in the early days of his marriage with her. The beautiful penniless girl—she would have stirred even a fish to romance; and it would not have been fair to call Godfrey fish-like. But ardours were not really in his line; too soon the rapturous lover subsided into the affectionate husband. Bernadette had shown no signs of noticing the change; perhaps she did not wish to check it. It may be that it coincided with a modification of her own feelings. At any rate, thus acquiesced in, it had gone further. Little of affection survived now, though they treated one another with the considerate politeness of an extinct passion. He gave her everything that she desired—even to the straining of his income; he was the only person for whom she ever "put herself out." Here were reciprocal, if tacit, apologies for a state of affairs which neither of them really regretted.

She had loved him, though, once. She did not claim it as a merit; there it was, a curious fact in her past life at which, in her rare moments of introspection, she would smile. She had loved not only all that he brought—ease, wealth, escape from sordidness; she had also loved him for bringing them. Even now sometimes she would love the memory of him as he had seemed in those days; then the considerate politeness would be coloured by a pretty tenderness, a sort of compassionate affection as for a man who had fallen from high estate, inevitably fallen but blamelessly. However these recrudescences on the whole embarrassed Godfrey Lisle, and Bernadette, laughing at herself, withdrew to a safe distance and to her real interests. Godfrey was not one of the interests of her life; he was only one of its conditions.

Into this household—though not, of course, below the surface of it—Arthur Lisle now made joyful and tremulous entry. His eyes were in no state to see clearly or to see far; they were glued to the central light, and for him the light burned bright to dazzling. Behold the vision that he saw—the vision of a Reigning Beauty!

It is a large party. There is no getting near her—at least no staying near. The crush forces a man away, however politely. But perhaps a far-off corner may afford a view, for a dexterous servant keeps clear a space just in front of her, and the onlooker is tall. They all come and speak to her, by ones and twos—ex-beauties, would-be beauties, rival beauties; for the last she has a specially cordial greeting—sometimes, if she knows them well, a word of praise for their gowns, always a quick approving glance at them. The great ladies come; for them a touch of deference, a pretty humility, a "Who am I that you should come to my house?" air, which gracefully masks her triumphant sense of personal power. The men come—all the young men who would adore if they might, and are very grateful for their invitations; they pass quickly, each with his reward of an indolent smile of welcome. The choice young men come; them she greets with a touch of distance lest they should grow proud in their hearts. No favour in them to come—far from it! Then an old man, a friend. Mark now the change; she is daughter-like in her affection and simplicity. Then perhaps a little stir runs through the company, a whisper, a craning of necks. A great man is coming—for beauty can draw greatness. There comes a massive white head—a ribbon and star perhaps, or the plain black that gives, not wears, such ornaments. He stays with her longer: there is no jostling now; the dexterous servant delays the oncoming stream of guests. Royal compliments are exchanged. It is a meeting between Potentates.

In some such dazzling colours may the ardent imagination of youth paint the quite ordinary spectacle of a pretty woman's evening party, while an old lady on one side of him complains that "everybody" is there, and an old man on the other says that it is a beastly crush, or damns the draught from a window behind him—lucky, perhaps, if he does not damn the Potentates too, the one for keeping him from his bed, the other for marching through rapine to dismemberment, or some such act of policy plainly reprehensible.

Strange to think—it is Youth that holds the brush again—strange and intoxicating—that this is the woman with whom he drives in the Park, of whose family luncheon he partakes, with whom he had tea yesterday, who makes a friend of him. She talked to him an hour yesterday, told him all about that hard childhood and girlhood of hers, how she had scanty food and coarse, had to make her own frocks and wash her own handkerchiefs; she said that she feared the hard training had made her hard, yet hoped with a sigh that it was not so, and seemed to leave the question to his sovereign arbitrament. She had made the little narrow home she came from real to him with cunning touches; she had made her leap of escape from it so natural, so touching. Of what the leap had brought her she had made light, had spoken with a gentle depreciation of the place her beauty had won—"Such looks as I have helped, I suppose, besides Godfrey's position"—and let him see how much more to her taste was a quiet talk with a friend than all the functions of society. How much better than the receiving of Beauties and Potentates was a quiet hour in the twilight of her little den with Cousin Arthur!

Could it be the same woman? Yes, it was. There was the wonder and the intoxication of it. He was

quite unknown to all that throng. But to himself he stood among them, eminent and superior. See, hadn't she thrown him a glance—right across the room? Well, at any rate he could almost swear she had!

Arthur Lisle—in the flesh at his cousin's evening party, in the spirit anywhere you like—felt a hand laid on his arm. He turned to find Sir Christopher Lance beside him.

"Ah, Mr. Lisle, aren't you glad you took my advice? I told you you were missing something by not coming here. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, sir, but you see, I didn't know—I didn't quite understand what you meant."

"You might have thought it worth while to find out," said the old man, smiling. "As it was, I'm told you had to be fetched."

Arthur laughed shamefacedly but happily. That was already a standing joke between him and Bernadette; hence the associations of it were altogether pleasant.

Sir Christopher's way was not to spoil joy in the name of wisdom nor to preach a safety that was to be won through cowardice. He saw the young man's excitement and exaltation, and commended it.

"Take as much of this sort of thing as you can get," he counselled, nodding his head towards the crowd and, incidentally, towards Bernadette. "Take a good dose of the world. It'll do you good. Society's an empty thing to people with empty heads, but not to the rest of us. And the more you go about, and so on—well, the fewer terrors will my Brother Pretyman possess for you."

Arthur Lisle caught at the notion eagerly. "Just what I've had in my own mind, sir," he said gravely.

"I thought from the look of you that you had some such wise idea in your head," said Sir Christopher with equal seriousness.

Arthur blushed, looked at him rather apprehensively, and then laughed. The Judge remained grave, but his blue eyes twinkled distantly. *O mihi praeteritos*—that old tag was running in his head.

"It's getting late; only bores stay late at large parties. Come and say good-night to our hostess."

"Do you think we might?" asked Arthur.

Certainly he was all of a flutter, as Judith Arden said.

CHAPTER VIII

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING HAVE!

Arthur Lisle sat in his chambers with a copy of the current number of the Law Reports (K.B.D.) before him and with utter discouragement in his heart. This mood was apt to seize him in the mornings, after the nights of gaiety which (obeying Mr. Justice Lance's advice) he eagerly sought. To-day it was intensified by the fact that Bernadette had gone to Paris for a fortnight. She bade him an affectionate, almost a tender, farewell, but she went, and was obviously glad to go. Though he asked nothing from her except to let herself be adored with a dog-like adoration, a shamefaced wonder that she should be so glad to go hid in his heart; mightn't she feel the loss of the adoration just a little more? However there it was. And he had nothing to do. Also he was hard up. The men he met at his parties had things to do and were doing them—interesting things that they could talk to women about, things they were actually doing, not mere hopes and dreams (such as had, not so long ago, been good enough to talk to Marie Sarradet about). They were making their marks, or, at least, some money. Talking of money, it was annoying, indeed humiliating, not being able to ask Bernadette to lunch at the resorts and in the style to which she was accustomed. He had done this once, and the same afternoon had suddenly been confronted with an appalling shininess in the back of his dress-coat; the price of the lunch would pretty well have paid for a new coat. But there—if you gave parties you could not have new coats; and what was the good of new coats unless you could give parties? A vicious circle!

Stagnation! That was what his life was—absolute stagnation. No avenues opened, there were no prospects. Stagnation and Vacancy—that's what it was!

A strange contrast is this to the young man at the evening party? Nay, no contrast at all, but just the other side of him, the complement of the mood which had pictured Potentates and thrilled over the Reigning Beauty. The more ardently youth gives one hand to hope, the more fiercely despair clutches the other.

Suddenly—even as Martin Luther flung his inkpot at Satan—Arthur Lisle with an oath seized the Law Reports (K.B.D.) and hurled them violently from him—across the room, with all his force, at this Demon of Stagnation and towards the door which happened to be opposite. They struck—not the door—but the waistcoat of Henry who at that moment opened it. Henry jumped in amazement.

"Beg your pardon, Henry. It slipped from my hand," said Arthur, grinning in ill-tempered mirth.

"Well, I thought no other gentleman was with you," remarked Henry, whose ideas of why one should throw books about were obviously limited. "A Mr. Halliday is here, sir, and wants to know if you'll see him."

"Of course I will. Show him in directly." As Henry went out, Arthur ejaculated the word "Good!"

Anybody would have been welcome—even Luther's Antagonist himself, perhaps—to Arthur in that black mood of his. Joe Halliday was a godsend. He carried cheerfulness with him—not of the order commended by moralists and bred by patience out of trouble, but rather a spontaneous hilarity of mind, thanks to which he derided the chances of life, and paddled his canoe with a laugh through the rapids of fortune. Joe had no settled means and he scorned any settled occupation. He preferred to juggle with half a dozen projects, keeping all of them in the air at once. He had something to sell and something to buy, something to find or something to get rid of; something had just been invented, or was just going to be; somebody needed money or somebody had it to invest. And all the Somebodies and Somethings were supposed to pay a toll to Joe for interesting himself in the matter. Generally they did; when they failed to, he paddled gaily on to another venture—Cantabat vacuus. But on the whole he was successful. The profits, the commissions, the "turns" came rolling in—and were rolled out again with a festive and joyous prodigality that took no thought for a morrow which, under the guidance of an acute and sanguine intelligence, should not have the smallest difficulty in providing for itself.

He bustled in and threw his hat on Arthur's table. "Morning, old chap. Sorry to interrupt! I expect you're awfully busy? Yes, I see! I see! Look at the briefs! Mr. Arthur Lisle—with you the Right Hon. Sir Richard Finlayson, K.C., M.P.—300 guineas! Whew! Mr. Arthur Lisle—With you——" He fingered the imaginary briefs, rolling his eyes at Arthur, and scratching his big hooked nose with the other hand.

"Go to the devil, Joe," said Arthur, smiling, suddenly able to smile, at the Demon of Stagnation as represented by his empty table. "Have a cigarette?"

"The subject of my call demands a pipe," and he proceeded to light one. "Have you got any money, Arthur?"

"I think you're roughly acquainted with the extent of my princely income."

"Income isn't money. Capital is. Turn your income into capital, and you've got money!"

"It sounds delightfully simple, and must work well—for a time, Joe."

"I've got a real good thing. No difficulty, no risk—well, none to speak of. I thought you might like to consider it. I'm letting my friends have the first chance."

"What is it? Gold, rubber, or a new fastener for umbrellas?" Arthur was not a stranger to Joe's variegated ventures.

"It's a deal safer than any of those. Did you ever see *Help Me Out Quickly*?"

"Yes. I saw it at Worcester once. Quite funny!"

"Well, a fellow who put five hundred into *Help Me Out Quickly* drew seventeen thousand in eighteen months and is living on it still. Arthur, I've found a farce compared to which *Help Me Out Quickly* is like the Dead March in Saul played by the vicar's wife on a harmonium."

"And you want money to produce it?"

"That's the idea. Two thousand or, if possible, two thousand five hundred. We could get the Burlington in the autumn—first-rate theatre. Lots of fun, and mints of money! The thing only wants seeing, doesn't it?"

"What's the use of talking to me, Joe? I haven't got——"

"We're all of us going in—quite a family affair! Raymond's in it, and old Pa Sarradet has put a bit in for Marie. And Mildred's governor has come in; and Amabel has begged a pony of her governor, and put it in—just for a lark, you know. I'm in—shirt, and boots, and all. We're all in—well, except Sidney. That chap's got no spunk."

The inference about Arthur, if he did not "come in," was sadly obvious to himself, though Joe had not in the least meant to convey it. But that did not much affect him. The idea itself filled him with a sudden, a delicious, tingle of excitement. Lots of fun and mints of money! Could there be a programme more attractive? Vacancy and Stagnation could not live in the presence of that.

"Just for curiosity—how much more do you want, to make it up?" asked Arthur.

"A thousand." Joe laughed. "Oh, I'm not asking you to put down all that. Just what you like. Only the more that goes in, the more comes out." He laughed again joyfully; his prophetic eyes were already beholding the stream of gold; he seemed to dip that beak of his in it and to drink deep.

Arthur knew what his income was only too well—also what was his present balance at the bank. But, of course, his balance at the bank (twenty-six pounds odd) had nothing to do with the matter. His mind ran back to *Help Me Out Quickly*. How Mother, and Anna, and he had laughed over it at Worcester! One or two of the "gags" in it were household words among them at Malvern to this day. Now Joe's farce was much, much funnier than *Help Me Out Quickly*.

"I know just the girl for it too," said Joe. "Quite young, awfully pretty, and a discovery of my own."

"Who is she?"

Joe looked apologetic. "Awfully sorry, old fellow, but the fact is we're keeping that to ourselves

for the present. Of course, if you came in, it'd be different."

The Law Reports still lay on the floor; Joe Halliday sat on the table—Sacred Love and Profane, Stern Duty and Alluring Venture.

"I'm putting up five hundred. Be a sport, and cover it!" said Joe.

Something in Arthur Lisle leapt to a tremendous decision—a wild throw with Fortune. "You can put me down for the thousand you want, Joe," he said in quite a calm voice.

"Christopher!" Joe ejaculated in amazed admiration. Then a scruple, a twinge of remorse, seized him for a moment. "That's pretty steep, old chap—and nothing's an absolute cert!" Temperament triumphed. "Though if there's one on God's earth we've got it!"

"In for a penny, in for a pound! Nothing venture, nothing have!" cried Arthur, feeling wonderfully gleeful.

"But, I say, wouldn't you like to read it first?" Conscience's expiring spark!

"I'd sooner trust your opinion than my own. I may read it later on, but I'll put down my money first."

"Well, I call you a sport!" Joe was moved and put out his hand. "Well, here's luck to us!"

Arthur had plunged into deep water, but it did not feel cold. He suffered no reaction of fear or remorse. He was buoyant of spirit. Life was alive again.

"Of course I shall have to sell out. I haven't the cash by me," he said, smiling at the idea. The cash by him indeed! The cash that ought to keep him, if need be, for six or seven years, pretty near a quarter of all he had in the world, representing the like important fraction of his already inadequate income. Why, now the income would be hopelessly inadequate! His mind was moving quickly. What's the use of trying to live on an inadequate income? While Joe was yet in the room, Arthur formed another resolution—to realise and spend, besides Joe's thousand (as his thoughts called it), another five hundred pounds of his money. "By the time that's gone," said the rapidly moving mind, "either I shall have made something or I shall have to chuck this—and thank heaven for it!"

But all this while, notwithstanding his seething thoughts, he seemed very calm, gently inhaling his cigarette smoke. Joe thought him the finest variety of "sport"—the deadly cool plunger. But he also thought that his friend must be at least a little better off than he had hitherto supposed—not that he himself, having the same means as Arthur, would not have risked as much and more without a qualm. But that was his temper and way of living; he had never credited Arthur with any such characteristics. However his admiration remained substantially unchanged; many fellows with tons of money had no spunk.

"May I tell them in Regent's Park?" he asked. "It'll make 'em all sit up."

"Tell them I'm in with you, but not for how much."

"I shall let 'em know you've done it handsome."

"If you like!" laughed Arthur. "How are they? I haven't seen them just lately."

"They're all right. You have been a bit of an absentee, haven't you?"

"Yes, I must go one day soon. I say, Joe, who are your stockbrokers?"

Joe supplied him with the name of his firm, and then began to go. But what with his admiration of Arthur, and his enthusiasm for the farce, and the beauty and talent of the girl he had discovered, it was, or seemed, quite a long time before he could be got out of the room. Arthur wanted him to go, and listened to all his transports with superficial attention; his real mind was elsewhere. At last Joe did go—triumphant to the end, already fingering thousands just as, on his entrance, he had so facetiously fingered Arthur's imaginary briefs. Arthur was left alone with the Law Reports—still on the floor where they had fallen in rebound from Henry's waistcoat. Let them lie! If they had not received notice to quit, they had at least been put very much on their good behaviour. "Prove you're of some use, or out you go!"—Arthur had delivered to them his ultimatum.

So much, then, for his Stern Mistress the Law—for her who arrogated the right to exact so much and in return gave nothing, who claimed all his days only to consume them in weary waiting, who ate up so much of his means with her inexorable expenses. She had tried to appease him by dangling before his eyes the uncertain distant prospect that in the space of years—some great, almost impossible, number of years—he would be prosperous—that he would be even as Norton Ward was, with briefs rolling in, "silk" in view, perhaps a candidature. It seemed all very remote to Arthur's new impatience. He set his mistress a time-limit. If within the time that it took him to spend that five hundred pounds—he did not decide definitely how long it would be—she did something to redeem her promises, well and good, he would be prepared to give her a further trial. If not, he would be take himself, with his diminished income, to fresh woods and pastures new, lying over the Back of Beyond in some region unexplored and therefore presumed to be fertile and attractive. He would indeed have no choice about the matter, since the diminished income would no longer meet her exactions, and yet enable him to live. A break with the Stern, and hitherto ungrateful, Mistress would be a matter of compulsion. He was very glad of it.

What of that other—the Mistress of his Fancy, delicate sumptuous Cousin Bernadette? Vaguely, yet with a true instinct, he felt that she was at the back of this mood of his and the impulses it inspired. She was the ultimate cause, Joe Halliday's sanguine suggestions but the occasion. Had he not outbid Joe's daring with a greater of his own? She it was who had stirred him to

discontent, be it divine or a work of the Devil's; she it was who braved him to his ventures. She showed him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them—or, at least, very tempting glimpses thereof; would she not herself be his guide through them, conferring on them thereby a greater glory? In return he was ready enough to fall down and worship, asking for himself nothing but leave to kneel in the precincts of the shrine, not touching so much as the hem of her garment.

In response to her beauty, her splendour, the treasure of her comradeship, he offered a devotion as humble and unselfish as it was ardent. But he burned to have an offering to lay at her feet—a venture achieved, the guerdon of a tournament. The smaller vanities worked with these high-flying sentiments. For her sake he would be comely and well-equipped, point-de-vice in his accoutrements; not a poor relation, client, or parasite, but a man of the world—a man of her world—on equal terms with others in it, however immeasurably below herself. If she thought him worthy of her favour, others must think him worthy too; to which end he must cut a proper figure. And that speedily; for a horrible little fiend, a little fiend clever at pricking young men's vanity to the quick, had whispered in his ear that, if he went shabby and betrayed a lack of ready cash, Cousin Bernadette might smile—or be ashamed. Adoration must not have her soaring wings clipped by a vile Economy.

All these things had been surging in him—confusedly but to the point of despair—when he threw the Law Reports across the room and hit Henry in the waistcoat; he had seemed caught hopelessly in his vicious circle, victim beyond help to the Demon of Stagnation. Not so strange, then, his leap for life and freedom, not so mad could seem the risks he took. Joe Halliday had come at a moment divinely happy for his purpose, and had found an audacity greater than his own, the audacity of desperation. Arthur himself wondered not at all at what he had done. But he admired himself for having done it, and was deliciously excited.

Before he left the Temple—and he left that day for good at one o'clock, being by no means in the mood to resume the Law Reports—he wrote two letters. One was to the firm whose name Joe had given him; it requested them to dispose of so much of his patrimony as would produce the sum of fifteen hundred pounds. The other was to his mother. Since it contained some observations on his position and prospects, an extract from it may usefully be quoted:—

"Since I last wrote, I have been considering what is the wisest thing to do with regard to the Bar. No work has appeared yet. Of course it's early days and I am not going to be discouraged too easily. The trouble is that my necessary expenses are heavier than I anticipated; chambers, clerk, circuit, etc., eat into my income sadly, and even with the strictest economy it will, I'm afraid, be necessary to encroach on my capital. I have always been prepared to do this to some extent, regarding it as bread cast upon the waters, but it clearly would not be wise to carry the process too far. I must not exhaust my present resources unless my prospects clearly warrant it. Of course I shall come to no hasty decision; we can talk it all over when I'm with you in the summer. But unless some prospects do appear within a reasonable time, I should be disposed to turn to something else while I still have enough capital to secure an opening." ... "You were quite right, dear Mother, about my calling on the Godfrey Lisles, and I was quite wrong—as usual! I'm ever so glad I've made friends with them at last. They are both delightful people, and they've got a charming house. I've been to several parties there, and have met people who ask me to other houses, so I'm getting quite gay. Cousin Godfrey is quiet and reserved, but very kind. Cousin Bernadette is really awfully pretty and jolly, and always seems glad to see me. She says she's going to launch me in society! I don't object, only, again, it all costs money. Well, I think it's worth a little, don't you?"

And there was a postscript: "Don't worry over what I've said about money. I'm all right for the present, and—*between ourselves*—I've already something in view—apart from the Bar—which is quite promising."

"What a wise, prudent, thoughtful boy it is!" said the proud mother.

CHAPTER IX

A COMPLICATION

Bernadette Lisle's foray on the shops of Paris, undertaken in preparation for the London season, was of so extensive an order as to leave her hardly an hour of the day to herself; and in the evenings the friends with whom she was staying—Mrs. and Miss Stacey Jenkinson, Europeanised Americans and most popular people—insisted on her society. So it was with the greatest difficulty that she had at last got away by herself and was able to come to lunch.

"Though even now," she told Oliver Wyse, as they sat down together at the Café de Paris, "it's a secret assignation. I'm supposed to be trying on hats!"

"All the sweeter for secrecy, and I suppose we're not visible to more than two hundred people."

He had a fine voice, not loud but full and resonant. There were many things about him that Bernadette liked—his composure, his air of being equal to all things, his face and hands browned by the sun in southern climes, his keen eyes quickly taking in a character or apprehending a mood. But most of all to her fancy was his voice. She told him so now with her usual naturalness.

"It is pleasant to hear your voice again." She gave him a quick merry glance. "Do you mind my saying that?"

"Yes, I hate compliments."

"I'm sorry." She was chaffing him, but she did it with a subtle little touch of deference, quite unlike anything in her manner towards either her husband or her new toy, Cousin Arthur. In this again she was, while pretty, natural. Oliver Wyse was a dozen years her senior, and a distinguished man. He had a career behind him in the Colonial Service, a career of note, and was supposed to have another still in front of him in the directorate of a great business with world-wide interests. To take up this new work—very congenial and promising much wealth, which had not hitherto come his way—he had bade farewell to employment under Government. Some said his resignation had been hailed with relief since he did not count among his many virtues that of being a very docile subordinate. His representations were apt to be more energetic, his interpretation of orders less literal, than official superiors at the other end of the cable desired. So with many compliments and a Knight Commandership of the appropriate Order he was gracefully suffered to depart.

"But a jolly little lunch like this is worth a lot of meetings at squashes and so on, isn't it? By the way, you didn't come to mine the other day, Sir Oliver." (She referred to the party which Mr. Arthur Lisle had attended.)

"I don't like squashes."

"Compliments and squashes! Anything else? I want to know what to avoid, please." She rested her chin on her hand and looked at him with an air of wondering how far she could safely go in her banter.

"I'm not sure I like handsome young cousins very much."

"I haven't any more—at least I'm afraid not! Even Arthur was quite a surprise. I believe I should never have known of him but for Esther Norton Ward."

"Meddling woman! For a fortnight after his appearance I was obviously *de trop*."

"I was afraid he'd run away again; he's very timid. I had to tie him tight at first."

"Suppose I had run away? You don't seem to have thought of that."

Her changeful lips pouted a little. "I might run after you, I shouldn't after Arthur—and then I could bring you back. At least, could I, Sir Oliver? Oh, dear, I've very nearly paid you another compliment!"

"I didn't mind that one so much. It was more subtle."

"I don't believe you mind them a bit, so long as they're—well, ingenious enough. You've been spoilt by Begums, or Ranees, or whatever they're called, I expect."

"That's true. You must find me very hard to please, of course."

"Well, there's a—a considering look in your eyes sometimes that I don't quite like," said Bernadette. She laughed, sipped her wine, and turned to her cutlet with good appetite.

She spoke lightly, jestingly, but she laid her finger shrewdly on the spot. She charmed him, but she puzzled him too; and Oliver Wyse, when he did not understand, was apt to be angry, or at least impatient. A man of action and of ardour, of strong convictions and feelings, he could make no terms with people who were indifferent to the things he believed in and was moved by, and who ordered their lives—or let them drift—along lines which seemed to him wrong or futile. He was a proselytiser, and might have been, in other days, a persecutor. Not to share his views and ideals was a blunder bordering on a crime. Even not to be the sort of man that he was constituted an offence, since he was the sort of man of whom the Empire and the World had need. Of this offence Godfrey Lisle was guilty in the most heinous degree. He was quite indifferent to all Oliver's causes—to the Empire, to the World, to a man's duty towards these great entities; he drifted through life in a hazy æstheticism, doing nothing, being profoundly futile. His amiability and faithful affections availed nothing to save him from condemnation—old maids' virtues, both of them! Where were his feelings? Had he no passion in him? A poor, poor creature, but half a man, more like a pussy-cat, a well-fed old pussy-cat that basks before the fire and lets itself be stroked, too lazy to catch mice or mingle in affrays at midnight. An old house-cat, truly and properly contemptible!

But inoffensive? No, not to Oliver's temper. Distinctly an offence on public and general grounds, a person of evil example, anathema by Oliver's gospel—and a more grievous offender in that, being what he was, he was Bernadette's husband. What a fate for her! What a waste of her! What emptiness for mind and heart must lie in existence with such a creature—it was like living in a vacuum! Her nature must be starved, her capacities in danger of being stunted. Surely she must be supremely unhappy?

But to all appearances she was not at all unhappy. Here came the puzzle which brought that "considering look" into his eyes and tinged it with resentment, even while he watched with delight the manifold graces of her gaiety.

If she were content, why not leave her alone? That would not do for Oliver. She attracted him, she charmed his senses. Then she must be of his mind, must see and feel things as he did. If he was bitterly discontented for her, she must be bitterly discontented for herself. If he refused to acquiesce in a stunted life for her, to her too the stunted life must seem intolerable. Otherwise

what conclusion was there save that the fair body held a mean spirit? The fair body charmed him too much to let him accept that conclusion.

"Enjoying your holiday from home cares?" he asked.

"I'm enjoying myself, but I haven't many home cares, Sir Oliver."

"Your husband must miss you very much."

She looked a little pettish. "Why do you say just the opposite of what you mean? You've seen enough of us to know that Godfrey doesn't miss me at all; he has his own interests. I couldn't keep that a secret from you, even if I wanted to; and I don't particularly want. You're about my greatest friend and——"

"About?"

"Well, my greatest then—and don't look as if somebody had stolen your umbrella."

He broke into a laugh for an instant, but was soon grave again. She smiled at him appealingly; she had been happier in the light banter with which they had begun. That she thoroughly enjoyed; it told her of his admiration, and flattered her with it; she was proud of the friendship it implied. When he grew serious and looked at her ponderingly, she always felt a little afraid; and he had been doing it more and more every time they met lately. It was as though he were thinking of putting some question to her—some grave question to which she must make answer. She did not want that question put. Things were very well as they stood; there were drawbacks, but she was not conscious of anything very seriously wrong. She found a great deal of pleasure and happiness in life; there were endless small gratifications in it, and only a few rubs, to which she had become pretty well accustomed. Inside the fair body there was a reasonable little mind, quite ready for reasonable compromises.

They had finished their meal, which Bernadette at least had thoroughly appreciated. She lit a tiny cigarette and watched her companion; he had fallen into silence over his cigar. His lined bronzed face looked thoughtful and worried.

"Oh, you think too much," she told him, touching his hand for an instant lightly. "Why don't you just enjoy yourself? At any rate when you're lunching with a friend you like!"

"It's just because I like the friend that I think so much."

"But what is there to think so much about?" she cried, really rather impatiently.

"There's the fact that I'm in love with you to think about," he answered quietly. It was not a question, but it was just as disconcerting as the most searching interrogatory; perhaps indeed it differed only in form from one.

"Oh, dear!" she murmured half under her breath, with a frown and a pout. Then came a quick persuasive smile. "Oh, no, you're not! I daresay you think me pretty and so on, but you're not in love." She ventured further—so far as a laugh. "You haven't time for it, Sir Oliver!"

He laughed too. "I've managed to squeeze it in, I'm afraid, Bernadette."

"Can't you manage to squeeze it out again? Won't you try?"

"Why should I? It suits me very well where it is."

She made a little helpless gesture with her hands, as if to say, "What's to be done about it?"

"You're not angry with me for mentioning the fact?"

"Angry? No. I like you, you see. But what's the use?"

He looked her full in the eyes for a moment. "We shall have to discuss that later."

"What's the use of discussing? You can't discuss Godfrey out of existence!"

"Not out of existence—practically speaking?"

"Oh, no! Nonsense! Of course not!" She was genuinely vexed and troubled now.

"All right. Don't fret," he said, smiling. "It can wait."

She looked at him gravely, her lips just parted. "You do complicate things!" she murmured.

"You'd rather I'd held my tongue about it?"

"Yes, I would—much."

"I couldn't, you see, any longer. I've been wanting to say it for six months. Besides, I think I'm the sort of fellow who's bound to have a thing like that out and see what comes of it—follow it to the end, you know."

She thought that he probably was; there lay the trouble. The thing itself was pleasant enough to her, but she did not want to follow it out. If only he would have left it where it was—under the surface, a pleasant sub-consciousness for them both, blending with their friendship a delightful sentiment! Dragged into the open like this, it was very hard to deal with.

"Can't you try and forget about it?" she whispered softly.

"Oh, my dear!" he muttered, laughing in a mixture of amusement and exasperation.

She understood something of what his tone and his laugh meant. She gave him a quick little nod of sympathy. "Is it as bad as that? Then my question was stupid," she seemed to say. But though she understood, she had no suggestion to offer. She sat with her brows furrowed and her lips

pursed up, thoroughly outfaced by the difficulty.

"You go back home to-morrow, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes. And you?"

"In a few days. I've not quite finished my business. Do you want me to come to the house as usual?"

"Oh yes," she answered quickly, her brow clearing.

"In the hope that I shall get over it?"

"Yes."

"I shan't, you know."

"You can never tell. Godfrey was in love with me once. I was in love with him too." Her expression plainly added what her lips refrained from: "Isn't that funny?"

He shrugged his shoulders, in refusal to consider so distasteful a subject. Her mind appeared to dwell on it a little, for she sat smiling reflectively. She had recovered quickly from her alarmed discomfort; in fact she seemed so at ease, so tranquil, that he was prompted to say—saying it, however, with a smile—"I didn't introduce the topic just to pass the time after lunch, you know." He paused and then added gravely but simply, "I want you to look back on this as the greatest day in your life."

Ever so slightly she shook her head. The room was nearly empty now; the few who lingered were no less absorbed than themselves. He put his hand on the top of her right hand on the table. "There's my pledge for life and all I'm worth—if you will," he said.

At this she seemed moved by some feeling stronger than mere embarrassment or discomfort. She gave a little shiver and raised her eyes to his with a murmured "Don't!" It was as though she now, for the first time, realised to some extent not only what he meant but what he felt, and that the realisation caused her a deeper alarm. She sighed as though under some weight and now, also for the first time, blushed brightly. But when they were going to the door, she put her arm inside his for a moment, and gave him a friendly little squeeze. When he looked round into her face, she laughed rather nervously. "We're dear friends, anyhow," she said. "You can walk with me to my hat shop, if you like."

"I won't come in," he protested, in a masculine horror that she liked.

"Nobody asked you. I expect to find Laura Jenkinson waiting for me there. As it's your fault I'm so late, she'd be very cross with you."

They walked up the street together in silence for a little way. Then his attention was caught by a wonderful gown in a shop-window and he turned to her to point it out, with a laugh; he had determined to press her no further that day. To his surprise he saw that her eyes were dim; a tear trickled down her cheek.

"Why, Bernadette——!" he began in shocked remorse.

"Yes, I know," she interrupted petulantly. "Well, you frightened me. I'm—I'm not used to things like that." Then she too saw the startling frock. "Look at that, Sir Oliver! I don't believe I should ever dare to wear it!"

"I fancy it's meant to appeal to ladies of another sort."

"Is it? Don't they wear just what we do? Well, just a little more so, perhaps!" She stood eyeing the gown with a whimsical smile. "It is rather naughty, isn't it?" She moved on again. He watched her face now. She had wiped away the tear, no more came; she was smiling, not brightly, but yet with a pensive amusement. Presently she asked him a question.

"By what you said there—in the café, you know—did you mean that you wanted me to run away with you?"

He was rather surprised at her returning to the subject. "I meant that I wanted to take you away with me. There'd be no running about it."

"What, to do it,—openly?"

"Anything else wouldn't be at all according to my ideas. Still——" He shrugged his shoulders again; he was not sure whether, under stress of temptation, he would succeed in holding to his point.

She began to laugh, but stopped hastily when she saw that he looked angry. "Oh, but you are absurd, you really are," she told him in a gentle soothing fashion.

"I don't see that anybody could call it absurd," he remarked, frowning. "Some good folk would no doubt call it very wicked."

"Well, I should, for one," said Bernadette, "if that's of any importance."

She made him laugh again, as she generally could. "I believe I could convince you, if that's the obstacle," he began.

"I don't suppose it is really—not the only one anyhow. Oh, here's the shop!"

She stopped, but did not give him her hand directly. She was smiling, but her eyes seemed large with alarm and apprehension.

"I do wish you'd promise me never to say another word about this." There was no doubt of her almost pitiful sincerity. It made him very remorseful.

"I wish to God I could, Bernadette," he answered.

"You're very strong. You can," she whispered, her face upturned to his.

He shook his head; now her eyes expressed a sort of wonder, as if at something beyond her understanding. "I'm very sorry," he muttered in compunction.

She sighed, but gave him her hand with a friendly smile. "No, don't be unhappy about it—about having told me, I mean. I expect you couldn't help it. *Au revoir*—in London!"

"Couldn't we dine, or go to the play, or something, to-night?" It was hard to let her out of his sight.

"I'm engaged, and——" She clasped her hands for a moment as though in supplication. "Please not, Oliver!" she pleaded.

He drew back a little, taking off his hat. Her cheeks were glowing again as she turned away and went into the shop.

CHAPTER X

THE HERO OF THE EVENING

That same afternoon—the day before Bernadette was to return from Paris—Marie Sarradet telephoned to Arthur asking him to drop in after dinner, if he were free; besides old friends, a very important personage was to be there, Mr. Claud Beverley, the author of the wonderfully funny farce; Marie named him with a thrill in her voice which even the telephone could not entirely smother. Arthur was thrilled too, though it did cross his mind that Mr. Claud Beverley must have rechristened himself; authors seldom succeed in achieving such suitable names as that by the normal means. Though he was still afraid of Mr. Sarradet and still a little embarrassed about Marie herself, he determined to go. He put on one of his new evening shirts—with pleats down the front—and one of his new white evening waistcoats, which was of extremely fashionable cut, and sported buttons somewhat out of the ordinary; these were the first products of the five hundred pounds venture. He looked, and felt, very well turned-out.

Old Mr. Sarradet was there this time, and he was grumpy. Marie seized a chance to whisper that her father was "put out" because Raymond had left business early to go to a race-meeting and had not come back yet—though obviously the races could not still be going on. Arthur doubted whether this were the whole explanation; the old fellow seemed to treat him with a distance and a politeness in which something ironical might be detected; his glance at the white waistcoat did not look wholly like one of honest admiration. Marie too, though as kind and cordial as possible, was perhaps a shade less intimate, less at ease with him; any possible sign of appropriating him to herself was carefully avoided; she shared him, almost ostentatiously, with the other girls, Amabel and Mildred. Any difference in Marie's demeanour touched his conscience on the raw; the ingenious argument by which he had sought to acquit himself was not quite proof against that.

Nothing, however, could seriously impair the interest and excitement of the occasion. They clustered round Mr. Beverley; Joe Halliday saw to that, exploiting his hero for all he was worth. The author was tall, gaunt, and solemn-faced. Arthur's heart sank at the first sight of him—could he really write anything funny? But he remembered that humorists were said to be generally melancholy men, and took courage. Mr. Beverley stood leaning against the mantelpiece, receiving admiration and consuming a good deal of the champagne which had been produced in his special honour. Joe Halliday presented Arthur to him with considerable ceremony.

"Now we're all here!" said Joe. "For I don't mind telling you, Beverley, that without Lisle's help we should be a long way from—from—well, from standing where we do at present."

Arthur felt that some of the limelight—to use a metaphor appropriately theatrical—was falling on him. "Oh, that's nothing! Anything I could afford—awfully glad to have the chance," he murmured, rather confusedly.

"And he did afford something pretty considerable," added Joe, admiringly.

"Of course I can't guarantee success. You know what the theatre is," said Mr. Beverley.

They knew nothing about it—and even Mr. Beverley himself had not yet made his bow to the public; but they all nodded their heads wisely.

"I do wish you would tell us something about it, Mr. Beverley," said impulsive Amabel.

"Oh, but I should be afraid of letting it out!" cried Mildred.

"The fact is, you can't be too careful," said Joe. "There are fellows who make a business of finding out about forthcoming plays and stealing the ideas. Aren't there, Beverley?"

"More than you might think," said Mr. Beverley.

"I much prefer to be told nothing about it," Marie declared, smiling. "I think that makes it ever so

much more exciting."

"I recollect a friend of mine—in the furniture line—thirty years ago it must be—taking me in with him to see a rehearsal once at the—Now, let's see, what was the theatre? A rehearsal of—tut—Now, what was the play?" Old Mr. Sarradet was trying to contribute to the occasion, but the tide of conversation overwhelmed his halting reminiscences.

"But how do you get the idea, Mr. Beverley?"

"Oh, well, that may come just at any minute—anywhere, you know."

"Where did this one come?"

"Oh, I got this one, as it happens, walking on Hampstead Heath."

"Hampstead Heath! Fancy!" breathed Amabel Osling in an awed voice.

"And you went straight home and wrote it out?" asked Mildred Quain.

"Oh, I've got my office in the daytime. I can only write at nights."

"Bit of a strain!" murmured Joe.

"It is rather. Besides, one doesn't begin by writing it out, Miss Quain." He smiled in condescending pity. "One has to construct, you see."

"Yes, of course. How stupid of me!" said Mildred, rather crestfallen.

"Not a bit, Miss Quain. You naturally didn't realise"—Mr. Beverley seemed genuinely sorry if he had appeared to snub her. "And I—I should like to tell you all how much I—I feel what you're doing. Of course I believe in the thing myself, but that's no reason why—Well, I tell you I do feel it. I—I feel it really."

They had admired him before; they liked him the better for this little speech. He came off his pedestal, and made himself one of them—a co-adventurer. His hesitation and his blush revealed him as human. They got a new and pleasantly flattering sense of what they were doing. They were not only going to make money and have fun; they were helping genius.

Joe raised his glass. "Here's luck to the Author and the Syndicate!"

"The what?" asked Amabel Osling. "I mean, what is a syndicate?"

"We are!" answered Joe with mock solemnity. "Fill your glasses—and no heel-taps!"

They drank to Mr. Claud Beverley and their enterprising selves. Joe clasped the author's hand. Mr. Beverley drained his glass.

"Here's luck!" he echoed. There was just a little shake in his voice; the occasion was not without its emotions for Mr. Beverley. Never before had he been the Hero of the Evening. His imagination darted forward to a wider triumph.

Arthur was moved too. He felt a generous envy of Mr. Beverley, awkward and melancholy as he was. Beverley was doing something—really off his own bat. That was great. Well, the next best thing was to help—to be in the venture; even that was making something of life. As he listened to the talk and shared in the excitement, his embarrassment had worn away; and old Sarradet himself had clinked glasses with him cordially.

Just on the heels of Mr. Beverley's "Here's luck!"—almost clashing with it—came a loud ring at the front door.

"Why, who's that?" exclaimed Marie.

They heard the scurry of the maid's feet. Then came a murmur of voices and the noise of the door closing. Then a full hearty voice—known to them all except Mr. Beverley—said: "That's better, old chap! You're all right now!"

The maid threw open the door of the room, and the festive and excited group inside received a sudden shock that banished all thought of Author and Syndicate alike. Very pale, very dishevelled, and seeming to totter on his feet, Raymond Sarradet came in, supported by Sidney Barslow's sturdy arm round his shoulders. Sidney was dishevelled too; his coat was torn all down the front, his hat was smashed. He had a black eye, a cut on the lip, and a swollen nose. They were a dismal battered pair.

"That's right, old chap! Here's a chair." Sidney gently deposited his friend in a seat and looked round at the astonished company. "They gave him a fair knock-out," he said, "but he's come round now." Then he spoke to Marie directly. "Still I thought I'd better see him home—he's a bit shaky."

"Oh, but you too!" she exclaimed. And to the maid she added: "Bring some hot water and a sponge quickly—and towels, you know—Oh, and plaster! Be quick!"

"What the devil is all this?" demanded old Sarradet, very red and very bristly.

"They'd have had everything out of me, but for Sidney. Lucky if they hadn't killed me!" said Raymond, resting his head on his hand. "Gad, how my head aches!"

Amabel came and laid her hand on his forehead. "Poor boy! What can have happened?"

"Give them some champagne, Joe. Oh, Sidney, you are hurt! Here's the hot water! Now let me!"

Sidney gave himself up to Marie's ministrations. Amabel and Mildred bathed Raymond's head with Eau-de-Cologne. Joe poured out champagne. The other men stood about, looking as if they

would like to do something, but could not think of anything to do. In the course of the ministrations the story gradually came out.

The two had gone to a suburban race-meeting together. Fortune favoured Raymond, and he came away with considerably more money than he started with. Three agreeable strangers got into their carriage, coming home. Raymond joined them in a game of cards, Sidney sitting out. On arrival at Waterloo the agreeable strangers proposed a "bite" together—and perhaps another little game afterwards? Sidney tried to persuade Raymond to refuse the invitation, but Raymond persisted in accepting it, and his friend would not leave him. The story continued on familiar lines—so familiar that Sidney's suspicions were very natural. There was the "bite," the wine, the game—Sidney still not playing. There was the lure of temporary success, the change of fortune, the discovery of the swindling.

"Sidney was looking on, you know," said Raymond, "and he nudged me. I had an idea myself by then, and I knew what he meant. So I watched, and I saw him do it—the big one with the red hair—you saw him too, didn't you, Sidney? Well, I was excited and—and so on, and I just threw my cards in his face. The next minute they rushed us up into a corner and went for us like blazes, the three of them. I did my best, but I'm only a lightweight. The big chap gave me one here"—he touched the side of his chin—"and down I went. I could call 'Murder!'—I wasn't unconscious—but that's all I could do. And the three of them went for Sidney. By Jove, you should have seen Sidney!"

"Rot!" came in a muffled tone from Sidney, whose lips were being bathed and plastered.

"He kept them all going for the best part of five minutes, I should think, and marked 'em too; gave 'em as good as he got! And I shouted 'Murder!' all the time. And that's what it would have been, if it had gone on much longer. But the waiters came at last—we were in some kind of a restaurant near Waterloo. I don't fancy the people were particular, but I suppose they didn't want murder done there. And so they came, and our friends made a bolt."

"But did nobody call the police?" asked Marie indignantly.

"Well," said Raymond, "they'd gone, you see, and——" He smiled weakly.

"It doesn't do any good to have that sort of thing in the papers," Sidney remarked.

"There you're quite right," said old Sarradet with emphasis. He came up to Sidney and laid his hand on his shoulder. "Thank you, Barslow, for looking after that young fool of mine," he added. "You showed great courage."

"Oh, I don't mind a scrap, sir," said Sidney. "I like the exercise."

"Oh, Sidney!" murmured Marie, in a very low voice, not far from a sob. The other girls clapped their hands; the men guffawed; Mr. Claud Beverley made a mental note—Not a bad line that!

Amidst the clash of arms the laws are silent, and even the arts do not go for much. Not Arthur's legal status nor yet his new elegance, no, nor Mr. Claud Beverley's genius, had any more chance that evening. The girls were aflame with primitive woman's admiration of fighting man—of muscles, skill, and pluck. Joe was an amateur of the noble art and must have every detail of the encounter. Old Sarradet fussed about, now scolding his son, now surreptitiously patting him on the shoulder, always coming back to Sidney with fresh praises and fresh proffers of champagne. Marie took her seat permanently by the wounded warrior's side, and delicately conveyed the foaming glass to his lacerated lips. More than admiration was in her heart; she was a prey to severe remorse. She had sent this man into banishment—a harsh sentence for a hasty word. His response was to preserve her brother!

Marie would have been more or less than human if she had not, by now, experienced a certain reaction of feeling in regard to Arthur Lisle. Her resentment she kept for Mrs. Veltheim and her father, and their bungling. Towards Arthur she remained very friendly, even affectionately disposed. But a sense of failure was upon her, and there came with it a diffidence which made her, always now, doubtful of pleasing him. Her old distrust of herself grew stronger; the fear of "grating" on him was more insistent. Thus her pleasure in his company was impaired, and she could no longer believe, as she used, in his pleasure in being with her. She thought she saw signs of uneasiness in him too sometimes—and she was not always wrong about that. In the result, with all the mutual goodwill in the world, there was a certain constraint. Save in such moments of excitement as had arisen over Mr. Beverley and his farce, neither could forget that there lay between them one of those uncomfortable things of which both parties are well aware, but which neither can mention. It was a consciousness which tended not indeed to hostility, but to separation. Arthur's new preoccupations, resulting in his visits to Regent's Park being much less frequent, intensified the feeling. Inevitably, as her dreams day by day faded, some of the bright hues with which they had decked Arthur Lisle faded from him also. He retained his own virtues and attractions; but gradually again it became possible for there to be other virtues and attractions in the world which were not his and which might advance rival pretensions.

Her natural affinities with Sidney Barslow, checked and indeed wilfully, if reluctantly, suppressed for the last few weeks, would have revived in any event so soon as the counter-attraction lost its monopolising power. The event of this evening—the dramatic and triumphant return of the banished friend—brought them to a quick and vigorous life again. To forgive was not enough. She burned to welcome and applaud—though still with a wary uneasy eye on Arthur. Yet she was—perversely—glad that he was there, that he should see what manner of man had suffered dismissal for his sake. This desire to magnify in his eyes a sacrifice which had proved useless was a subtle reproach to Arthur—the only one she levelled against him.

He had been among the first to shake the warrior by the hand. "Splendid, my dear fellow! Splendid!" he exclaimed with a genuine enthusiasm. "I wish I'd been there too—though I should have been of jolly little use, I'm afraid." His humility was genuine too; at that moment he would have given a great deal to be as good a fighting man as Sidney Barslow.

Sidney gave his hand readily, but he looked apologetic amidst all his glory. "Serves us right for taking up with those chaps and going to the beastly place. But after the races sometimes, you know—." He was trying to convey that such associates and such resorts were not habitual with him. He was remembering that unhappy encounter in Oxford Street far more painfully than Arthur.

"Why, that was all Raymond's fault, anyhow," Marie interposed indignantly. "You couldn't desert him!"

But Arthur did remember the encounter and with some shame. If there were occasions on which a man might not wish to know Sidney Barslow or to vouch for his respectability, there were evidently others on which he would be glad to have him by his side and to be recognised as entitled to his friendly services. Very likely the latter were really the more characteristic and important. At all events here he was to-night, a gallant spirit, brave and gay in battle—no small part of what goes to make a man. Arthur himself felt rather small when he remembered his fastidious horror.

"We're all proud of you, Barslow," said old Sarradet in his most impressive manner.

"We are, we are, we are!" cried Joe, and regardless of poor Raymond's aching head, he sat down at the piano and thumped out "See the Conquering Hero comes!"

Mr. Claud Beverley was robbed of the honours of the evening, but, to do him justice, he took his deposition in good part. In fact, as he walked home to those Northern Heights whence had come his wonderful inspiration, he found and hailed yet another Hero of the Evening. Neither Gifted Author nor Splendid Warrior!

"Put in as much as that, did he! Just made it possible! I should like to do that chap a turn if I could!"

Joe Halliday—his heart opened by emotion and champagne—had told him the Secret of the Thousand.

CHAPTER XI

HOUSEHOLD POLITICS

For the next three months—through the course of the London season, a fine and prosperous one—Arthur Lisle played truant. The poison of speculation was in his veins, the lust of pleasure in his heart; romantic imaginings and posings filled his thoughts. The Temple saw little of him. More than once Norton Ward would have offered him some "devilling" to do, or some case to make a note on; but Henry reported that Mr. Lisle was not at chambers. Norton Ward shrugged his shoulders and let the thing drop; the first duty of an earnest aspirant in the Temple is to be there—always waiting in the queue for employment. "You can't help a man who won't help himself," Norton Ward observed to his wife, who pursed up her lips and nodded significantly; she knew what she knew about the young man's case. Informed of his missed chances by a deferentially reproachful Henry, Arthur was impenitent. He did not want to make notes on cases and to do devilling; not so much now because of his terrors (though he still felt that Pretyman, J., was formidable) as because his own interests were too enthralling; he had no time to spare for the quarrels of John Doe and Richard Roe and the rest of the litigious tribe. There were roads to fortune shorter, less arid and less steep. Also there were green pastures and flowery dells, very pleasant though they led nowhere in particular, peopled by charming companions, enlivened by every diversion—and governed by a Fairy Queen.

In London an agreeable young man who has—or behaves as if he had—nothing to do will soon find things to do in plenty. Arthur's days were full; lunches, dinners, theatres, dances, tennis to play, cricket and polo matches to watch, a race-meeting now and then, motor excursions or a day on the river—time went like lightning in amusing himself and other people. Everybody accepted so readily the view that he was a man of leisure and wholly at their disposal that he himself almost came to accept it as the truth. Only in the background lay the obstinate fact that, in a life like this, even five hundred pounds will not last for ever. Never mind! In the autumn there would come the farce. There was a rare flavour in the moment when he wrote his cheque for a thousand pounds, payable to the order of Joseph Halliday, Esquire. Joe had asked for an instalment only, but Arthur was not going to fritter away the sensation like that.

Of course Bernadette had first call on him, and she used her privilege freely. At her house in Hill Street he was really at home; he was expected to come without an invitation; he was expected to come in spite of any other invitation, when he was wanted. He fetched and carried, an abject delighted slave. She never flirted with him or tried to win his devotion; but she accepted it and in return made a pet of him. Yet she had no idea how immense, how romantic, how high-flying the devotion was. She was not very good at understanding great emotions—as Oliver Wyse might perhaps have agreed. So, if she had no designs, she had no caution either; she was as free from

conscience as from malice; or it might be that any conscience she had was engaged upon another matter. Sir Oliver had not yet returned to town, but soon he was coming.

Engrossed in Bernadette herself, at first Arthur paid little heed to the other members of the household. Indeed he never became intimate with Judith Arden during all this time in London. He liked her, and forgave a satirical look which he sometimes caught directed at himself in consideration of her amusing satirical remarks directed at other people; and after all she could not be expected to appreciate the quality of his devotion to Bernadette. But with Godfrey Lisle things gradually reached a different footing. The shy awkward man began to put out feelers for friendship. Amongst all who came and went he had few friends, and he sought to make no more. Even Judith, as became her age and sex, was much occupied in gaieties. He spent his days in his library and in walking. But now he began to ask Arthur to join him. "If Bernadette can spare you," he would say; or, to his wife, "If you don't want Arthur this afternoon—" and so suggest a walk or a smoke together. He did not succeed in conveying the impression that he would be greatly pleased by the acceptance of his invitations. But he did give them, and that from him was much.

"Do go," Bernadette would say, or "Do stay," as the case might be. "He does like a talk so much." Strangely it appeared that this was the case, provided he could get his talk quietly with a single person—and, it must be added, though Arthur's eyes were not yet opened to this, provided that the person was not his wife. From private conversation with her he shrank, ever fearing that something might seem to be demanded of him which he could not give. But he read and thought much, and enjoyed an exchange of ideas. And he took to Arthur with the liking a reserved man often has for one who is expansive and easy of access. Arthur responded to his overtures, at first through a mixture of obligation and good-nature, then with a real interest, to which presently there was added a sympathy rather compassionate, a pity for a man who seemed by nature unable to take the pleasures which lay so plentiful around.

He fretted about money too—a thing pathetic to the eyes with which at present Arthur looked on the world. But he did; he might be found surrounded by account-books, rent-books, pass-books, puzzling over them with a forlorn air and a wrinkled brow. It was not long before he took Arthur into his confidence, in some degree at least, about this worry of his.

"We spend a terrible lot of money; I can't think where it all goes," he lamented.

"But isn't it pretty obvious?" laughed Arthur. "You do things in style—and you're always doing them!"

"There's this house—heavy! And Hilsey always sitting there, swallowing a lot!" Then he broke out in sudden peevishness: "Of course with anything like common prudence——" He stopped abruptly. "I'm not blaming anybody," he added lamely, after a pause. And then—"Do you keep within your income?"

"I don't just now—by a long chalk. But yours is a trifle larger than mine, you know."

"I can't do it. Well, I must raise some money, I suppose."

Arthur did not know what to say. The matter was intimate and delicate; for there could be no doubt who was responsible, if too much money were being spent.

"I'm sure if you—well, if you made it known how you feel——" he began.

"Yes, and be thought a miser!" His voice sank to a mutter just audible. "Besides all the rest!"

So he had grievances! Arthur smiled within himself. All husbands, he opined, had grievances, mostly unsubstantial ones. He could not believe that Godfrey was being forced into outrunning his means to any serious extent, or that he had any other grave cause for complaint. But, in truth, Godfrey's trouble—money apart—was an awkward one. He was aggrieved that he had not got what he did not want—his wife's affection. And he was aggrieved that she did not want what he had no desire to give her—namely, his. The state of things aggrieved him, yet he had no wish—at least no effective impulse—to alter it. He felt himself a failure in all ways save one—the provision of the fine things and the pleasures that Bernadette loved. Was he now to be a failure there too? He clung to the last rag of his tattered pride.

Yet often he was, in his shy awkward way, kindly, gracious, and anxious to make his kinsman feel sure of a constant welcome.

"Coming too often?" he said, in reply to a laughing apology of Arthur's. "You can't come too often, my dear boy! Besides you're a cousin of the house; it's open to you of right, both here and at Hilsey. Bernadette likes you to come too."

"Has she told you so?" Arthur asked eagerly.

"No, no, not in words, but anybody can see she does. We're too grave for her—Judith and I—and so's Oliver Wyse, I think. She likes him, of course, but with him she can't—er——"

"Play about?" Arthur suggested.

"Yes, yes, exactly—can't do that sort of thing, as she does with you. He's got too much on his shoulders; and he's an older man, of course." He was walking up and down his library as he talked. He stopped in passing and laid his hand on Arthur's shoulder for a moment. "It's good of you not to grudge me a talk either, sometimes."

"But I like talking to you. Why do you think I shouldn't?"

Godfrey was at the other end of the room by now, with his back turned, looking into a book.

"You've never seen Hilsey, have you? Would it bore you to come down for a bit later on? Very

quiet there, of course, but not so bad. Not for longer than you like, of course! You could cut it short if you got bored, you know."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of my being bored. I should love it of all things." Indeed the invitation filled him with delight and gratitude. "It's jolly good of you, Godfrey, jolly kind, I think."

Godfrey murmured something like, "See how you like it when you get there," sat down with his back still turned, and obliterated himself with a large book.

He was certainly difficult to know, to get to close quarters with. If he approached you at one moment, he shrank back the next; he seemed to live in equal fear of advances and of rebuffs. It was difficult to know how to take him, what idea to form of him. Plenty of negations suggested themselves readily in connection with him, but positive qualities were much harder to assign; it was easier to say what he was not than what he was, what he did not like than what he did, what he could not do than what he could. At all events what positive qualities he had did not help him much in his life, and were irrelevant to the problems it presented. By nature he was best made for a student, immured in books, free from the cares of position and property, and from the necessity of understanding and working with other people. Fate had misplaced him as a wealthy man, burdened with obligations, cumbered with responsibilities. He had misplaced himself as the husband of a brilliant and pleasure-loving wife. He ought to have been a bachelor—the liabilities of bachelors are limited—or the mate of an unpretending housewife who would have seen to his dinner and sewn on his buttons. In an unlucky hour of impulse he had elected to play Prince Charming to a penniless Beauty; Prince Charming appearing in a shower of gold. Of all the charms only the gold was left now, and the supply even of that was not inexhaustible, though the Beauty might behave as if it were. He had failed to live up to the promise of his first appearance, to meet the bill of exchange which he had accepted when he married Bernadette. He lacked the qualifications; ardour of emotion, power to understand and value a nature different from his own, an intelligent charity that could recognise the need in another for things of which he felt no need—these he had not, any more than he possessed the force of will and character which might have moulded the other nature to his own.

He met his failure with a certain dignity of bearing which all his awkwardness could not efface. He did not carp at his wife or quarrel with her; he treated her with consistent politeness and with a liberality even excessive. He showed no jealousy of her preferences; that she would ever give him cause for serious jealousy, fears for his honour, had never yet entered his head; such matters did not lie within the ordinary ambit of his thoughts. But the sense of failure had bitten deep into his heart; his pride chafed under it perpetually. His life was soured.

Arthur saw little of all this, and of what he did see he made light. It is always the easiest and most comfortable thing to assume that people are doing as they like and liking what they are doing. If Godfrey lived apart from the life of the house, doubtless it was by his own choice; and, if he had a grievance, it must just be about money. The paymaster always has a grievance about money; he is Ishmael, with every man's and every woman's hand against him—stretched out for more. A legitimate occasion for a grumble—but it would be absurd to make much of it.

Besides what serious trouble could there be when Bernadette was so radiant and serene, so gay and merry with himself and with Judith, so gentle and friendly with her husband? There seemed no question of two parties in the house—as there sometimes are in houses—with the one or the other of which it was necessary for him to range himself. His adoration for Bernadette in no way clashed with his growing affection for her husband; rather she encouraged and applauded every sign of greater intimacy between the men. It was with the sense of a triumph in which she would surely share that he carried to her the news that Godfrey—Godfrey himself, of his own accord—had invited him to Hilsey. Of her cordial endorsement of the invitation he had, of course, no doubt. Perhaps, after all, she had inspired it.

"Now don't say you put him up to it! That wouldn't be half such a score," he said, laughing.

She seemed surprised at the news; evidently she had not taken any part in the matter. She looked a little thoughtful, possibly even doubtful. Judith Arden, who was sitting by, smiled faintly.

"No, I had nothing to do with it," said Bernadette. "And it really is a triumph for you, Arthur." She was smiling again now, but there was a little pucker on her brow. "When's your best time to come?" she asked.

"In the early part of August, if I may. I shall have to run up and see mother afterwards, and I've got to be back in town in the middle of September—for our production, you know."

Bernadette by this time had been told all about the great farce and the great venture which had made it possible.

She appeared to consider something for a moment longer, so that Arthur added, "Of course if it's not convenient to have me then, if you're full up or anything——"

"Goodness no! There are twenty rooms, and there'll be nobody but ourselves—and Oliver Wyse perhaps."

"I thought Sir Oliver was coming earlier, directly we go down?" said Judith.

"He's coming about the seventeenth or eighteenth; but he may stay on, of course. On the other hand he may not come, or may come later, after all." She smiled again, this time as it were to herself. Sir Oliver's visit to Hilsey had been arranged before she lunched with him in Paris and might, therefore, be subject to reconsideration—by the guest, or the hostess, or both. She had neither seen him nor heard from him since that occasion; things stood between them just where

they had been left when she turned away and went into the hat-shop with glowing cheeks. There they remained even to her own mind, in a state of suspense not unpleasurable but capable of becoming difficult. It was just that possibility in them which made her brow pucker at the thought of Sir Oliver and Arthur Lisle encountering one another as fellow-guests at Hilsey.

Arthur laughed. "Well, if he doesn't mind me, I don't mind him. In fact I like him very much—what I've seen of him; it isn't much."

It was not much. Before Oliver Wyse went to Paris, they had met at Hill Street only three or four times, and then at large dinner parties where they had been thrown very little in contact.

"Oh, of course you'll get on all right together," said Bernadette.

"You've a lot in common with him really, I believe," Judith remarked.

Bernadette's lips twisted in a smile and she gave Judith a glance of merry reproof. They were both amused to see how entirely the point of the observation was lost on Arthur.

"I daresay we shall find we have, when we come to know each other better," he agreed in innocent sincerity.

Bernadette was stirred to one of the impulses of affectionate tenderness which the absolute honesty and simplicity of his devotion now and then roused in her. His faith in her was as absolute as his adoration was unbounded. For him she was as far above frailty as she was beyond rivalry or competition. Without realising the immensity of either the faith or the adoration, she yet felt that, if temptation should come, it might help her to have somebody by her who believed in her thoroughly and as it were set her a standard to live up to. And she was unwillingly conscious that a great temptation might come—or perhaps it was better to say that she might be subjected to a severe pressure; for it was in this light rather that the danger presented itself to her mind when she was driven to think about it.

She looked at him now with no shadow on her face, with all her usual radiant friendliness.

"At any rate I shall be delighted to have you there, Cousin Arthur," she said. She had managed, somehow, from the first to make the formal "Cousin" into just the opposite of a formality—to turn it into a term of affection and appropriation. She used it now not habitually, but when she wanted to tell him that she was liking him very much, and he quite understood that it had that significance. He flushed in pleasure and gratitude.

"That's enough for me. Never mind Sir Oliver!" he exclaimed with a joyful laugh.

"If it isn't an anti-climax, may I observe that I too shall be very glad to see you?" said Judith Arden with affected primness.

Arthur went away in triumph, surer still of Bernadette's perfection, making lighter still of Godfrey's grievances, dismissing Oliver Wyse as totally unimportant; blind to all the somewhat complicated politics of the house. They rolled off his joyous spirit like water off a duck's back.

CHAPTER XII

LUNCH AT THE LANCASTER

On a day in July, when this wonderful London season was drawing near an end, and the five hundred pounds had reached about half-way towards exhaustion, Arthur Lisle gave himself and his friends a treat. He invited the Syndicate—as they laughingly styled themselves—to lunch at the Lancaster Hotel. There were some disappointing refusals. Mr. Sarradet would not come; he was sulky in these days, for Raymond was neglecting his father's perfumery and spending his father's money; the integrity of the dowry was threatened, and old Sarradet had a very cold fit about the prospects of the theatrical speculation. Sidney Barslow—he was invited thanks to his heroic re-entry—pleaded work. The author himself wrote that he would be unavoidably detained at "the office"—Mr. Beverley was never more definite than that about the occupation which filled the day-time for him. But Marie and Amabel came, escorted by Joe Halliday, and they made a merry party of four. The girls were excited at being asked to the Lancaster. Such sumptuous places, though not perhaps beyond the Sarradet means, were quite foreign to the thrifty Sarradet habits. Amabel was of the suburbs and patronised "popular price" restaurants on her visits to town. Joe lived in grill rooms. The balcony of the Lancaster seemed magnificent, and Emile, the *maître d'hôtel*, knew Arthur quite well, called him by his name, and told him what brand of champagne he liked—marks of intimacy which could not fail to make an impression on Arthur's guests, and which Emile had a tactful way of bestowing even on quite occasional patrons.

Joe Halliday made his report. Everything was in trim, and going on swimmingly. The theatre was taken, a producer engaged, the girl who was Joe's own discovery secured and, besides her, a famous comic actor who could carry anything—anything—on his back. Rehearsals were to begin in a month.

"By this time next year lunch at the Lancaster will be an every-day event. Just now it can't be—so I'll trouble you for a little more fizz, Arthur," said Joe, with his great jolly laugh.

"Don't count your chickens——!" said cautious Marie.

"A coward's proverb!" cried Arthur gaily. "Why, you lose half the fun if you don't!"

"Even if we do fail, we shall have had our fun," Joe remarked philosophically.

The others could hardly follow him to these serene heights. Amabel had persuaded gold out of her "governor." Marie felt decidedly responsible to old Sarradet; and the pledge that Arthur had given to fortune was very heavy.

"If it becomes necessary, we'll try to feel like that," said Arthur, "but I hope we shan't have to try."

"Of course we shan't," Amabel insisted eagerly. "How can it fail? Of course it mayn't be quite such an enormous success as *Help Me*——"

"It'll knock *Help Me Out Quickly* into a cocked hat," Joe pronounced decisively. "Just see if it don't!" He turned to Marie. "Then what sort of a smile shall we see on old Sidney's face?" He could not quite forgive Sidney Barslow (hero as he was!) for having refused to "come in."

"Sidney's a wise man about business and—and money. Wiser than we are perhaps!" Marie smiled as she ate her ice.

"Sidney's developing all the virtues at a great pace," laughed Amabel. "Under somebody's influence!"

Joe laughed too; so did Marie, but she also blushed a little. Arthur was suddenly conscious of a joke which was new to him—something which the other three understood but he did not. He looked at Joe in involuntary questioning. Joe winked. He saw Marie's blush; it caused him a vague displeasure.

"Yes," Joe nodded. "He is. Works like a horse and goes to bed at eleven o'clock! I shouldn't be surprised if he turned up one fine day with a blue ribbon in his coat!"

"Oh, don't be so silly, Joe," laughed Marie; but the laugh sounded a little vexed, and the blush was not quite gone yet.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Arthur.

"Joking apart, he has put the brake on. Jolly good thing too! He's such a good chap—really."

Arthur was not ungenerous, but he could not help feeling that the apotheosis of Sidney Barslow might be carried too far. The vision of the scene in Oxford Street was still vivid in his mind; it would need a lot of heroism, a lot of reformation, altogether to obliterate that, however much he might agree to a gentler judgment of it.

"No, don't make a joke of it, Joe, anyhow not to Sidney himself," said Marie, looking a little embarrassed still, but speaking with her usual courage. "Because it's for our sake—well, mostly so, I think—that he's—he's doing what he is. I told him that in the beginning he had led Raymond into mischief, and that he ought to set him a better example now. And he's trying—without much success, I'm afraid, as far as Raymond is concerned." Her voice grew very troubled.

"I'm awfully sorry, Marie," Arthur murmured.

"Oh, I've no intention of rotting Sidney about it. If only because he'd probably hit me in the eye!"

"Yes, we know his fighting powers," laughed Amabel in admiring reminiscence. Her tone changed to one of regretful exasperation. "Raymond is a goose!"

"But we mustn't spoil Mr. Lisle's party with our troubles," said Marie, smiling again.

"Oh, come, I say, I'm not altogether an outsider!" Arthur protested with a sudden touch of vehemence.

"Oh, no, not that," Marie murmured, with a little shake of her head; her tone did not sound very convinced. Amabel giggled feebly. Joe covered a seeming embarrassment by gulping down his coffee and pretending to find it too hot. A constraint fell upon the party. Arthur wanted to make himself thoroughly one with them in anxiety and concern over Raymond's misdeeds—nay, even in admiration for Sidney Barslow's reformation; he wanted to, if he could. Yet somehow he found no words in which to convey his desire. Every phrase that came into his head he rejected; they all sounded cold and unreal, somehow aloof and even patronising. Silence, however awkward, was better than speeches like that.

It was one of Joe Halliday's chosen missions in life, and one of his greatest gifts, to relieve occasions of restraint and embarrassment by a dexterous use of humour. This social operation he now, perceiving it necessary, proceeded to perform. Clapping his hand to his forehead in a melodramatic manner, he exclaimed in low but intense tones, "Ask me who I want to be! Who I want to be in all the world! Ask me quickly!"

He won his smiles. "What's the matter now, Joe?" asked Arthur; his smile was tolerant.

"No, I'll tell you! Don't speak!" He pointed with his finger, past Arthur, towards the other end of the room. "There he sits! A murrain on him! That's the man! And how dare he lunch with that Entrancing Creature?"

"Which one, Joe? Which one?" asked Amabel, immediately full of interest.

"There—behind Arthur's back. He can't see her. Good thing too! He doesn't deserve to."

"I suppose I can turn round, if I want to—and if she's worth it. Is she, Marie?"

"Is it the one in blue, Joe? Yes, she is. Awfully pretty!"

"Never saw such a corker in my life!" Joe averred with solemnity.

"Then round—in a careless manner—goes my head!" said Arthur.

"He woos her, I swear he woos her, curses on his mother's grave!" Joe rode his jokes rather hard.

"We'd better not all stare at her, had we?" asked Marie.

"She's not looking; she's listening to the man," Amabel assured her.

Arthur turned round again—after a long look. He gave a little laugh. "It's my cousin, Bernadette Lisle. Joe, you are an ass."

It was Bernadette Lisle; she sat at a little table with Oliver Wyse. They had finished eating. Bernadette was putting on her gloves. Her eyes were fixed on Oliver's face, her lips were parted. The scene of the Café de Paris reproduced itself—and perhaps the topic. She had not seen Arthur when he came in, nor he her. She did not see him now. She listened to Sir Oliver.

"Your cousin! That! Introduce me—there may yet be time!" said the indomitable Joe.

"Oh, shut up!" groaned Arthur, half-flattered however, though half-peevish.

"She's very beautiful." Marie's eyes could not leave Bernadette. "And so—so—well, she looks like something very very precious in china."

Arthur looked round again; he could not help it. "Yes, that is rather it, Marie."

"Look—look at her hat, Marie!" came from Amabel in awed accents. Indeed the visit to the hat-shop in Paris had not been without its fruit.

"Now is it fair—is it reasonable—for a fellow to have a cousin like that? He might have a Queen like that, or a Dream like that, and I shouldn't care. But a cousin! He knows the Vision! He's talked to it! Heavens, he's probably lunched with it himself! And he kept it all dark from us—oh, so dark!"

"Is it Mr. Lisle with her?" asked Amabel, quite innocently.

Arthur smiled. "No, I don't think you'd find Godfrey lunching here. That's a man named Wyse. I've met him at their house."

"He's good-looking too," Amabel decided after a further survey.

A waiter brought Oliver Wyse his bill. When he turned to pay it, Bernadette rose. The spell which had held her attention so closely was broken. She looked round the room. Suddenly a bright smile came on her lips, she spoke a hurried word to her companion, and came straight across the room towards Arthur's table. She had recognised the back of his head.

"She's coming here!" whispered Amabel breathlessly.

Arthur turned round quickly, a bright gleam in his eyes. He rose from his chair; the next moment she was beside him, looking so joyful, so altogether happy.

"Oh, Arthur dear, I am glad!" She did not offer to shake hands; she laid her little hand on his coat-sleeve as she greeted him. "Did you see me—with Sir Oliver?" But she did not wait for an answer. "Do let me sit down with you for a minute. And mayn't I know your friends?" A waiter hurried up with a chair, and Bernadette sat down by Arthur. "Why, what fun this is! Cousin Arthur, I must have another ice." The gloves began to come off again, while Arthur made the necessary introductions.

"Oh, but I know you all quite well!" exclaimed Bernadette. "You're old friends of mine, though you may not know it."

Oliver Wyse, his bill paid, followed her with a leisurely step. He greeted Arthur cordially and included the rest of the table in a bow. "I gather you intend to stay a bit," he said to Bernadette, smiling. "I've got an appointment, so if you'll excuse me——?"

"Oh yes, Arthur will look after me." She gave him her hand. "Thanks for your lunch, Sir Oliver."

"It was so good of you to come," he answered, with exactly the right amount of courteous gratitude.

As he went off, she watched him for just a moment, then turned joyously back to her new companions. A casual observer might well have concluded that she was glad to be rid of Oliver Wyse.

Joe was—to use his own subsequent expression—"corpsed"; he had not a joke to make! Perhaps that was as well. But he devoured her with his eyes, manifesting an open admiration whose simple sincerity robbed it of offence. Bernadette saw it, and laughed at it without disguise. Amabel's eyes were even more for frock and hat than for the wearer; this it was to be not merely clothed but dressed. Marie had paid her homage to beauty; she was watching and wondering now. Arthur tasted a new delight in showing off his wonderful cousin to his old friends, a new pride in the gracious kindness of her bearing towards them. And Bernadette herself was as charming as she could be for Arthur's sake, and in gratitude for his appearance—for the casual observer would have been quite right as to her present feeling about Oliver Wyse.

Marie Sarradet revised her notions. She forgave her father his meddling; even against Mrs. Veltheim she pressed the indictment less harshly. Here surely was the paramount cause of her defeat! Mrs. Lisle and what Mrs. Lisle stood for against herself and what she represented—candid-minded Marie could not for a moment doubt the issue. Her little, firmly repressed

grievance against Arthur faded away; she must have a grievance against fate, if against anything. For it was fate or chance which had brought Mrs. Lisle on to the scene just when the issue hung in the balance. Yet with her quick woman's intuition, quickened again by her jealous interest, she saw clearly in ten minutes, in a quarter of an hour—while Bernadette chattered about the farce (valuable anyhow as a topic in common!) and wistfully breathed the hope that she would be able to come up from the country for the first night—that the brilliant beautiful cousin had for Arthur Lisle no more than a simple honest affection, flavoured pleasantly by his adoration, piquantly by amusement at him. He was her friend and her plaything, her protégé and her pet. There was not even a fancy for him, sentimental or romantic; at the idea of a passion she would laugh. See how easy and unconstrained she was, how open in her little familiar gestures of affection! This woman had nothing here to conceal, nothing to struggle against. It was well, no doubt. But it made Marie Sarradet angry, both for herself and for Arthur's sake. To take so lightly what had so nearly been another's—to think so lightly of all that she had taken!

The intuition, quick as it was, had its limits; maybe it worked better on women than on men, or perhaps Marie's mind was somewhat matter-of-fact and apt to abide within obvious alternatives—such as "He's in love, or he's not—and there's an end of it!" Arthur loved his cousin's wife, without doubt. But, so far at least, it was an adoration, not a passion; an ardour, not a pursuit. He asked no more than he received—leave to see her, to be with her, to enjoy her presence, and in so doing to be welcome and pleasant to her. Above all—as a dim and distant aspiration, to which circumstances hitherto had shown no favour—to serve her, help her, be her champion. This exalted sentiment, these rarefied emotions, escaped the analysis of Marie's intuition. What she saw was an Arthur who squandered all the jewels of his heart and got nothing for them; whereas in truth up to now he was content; he was paid his price and counted himself beyond measure a gainer by the bargain.

Who was the other man—the man of quiet demeanour and resolute face, who had so held her attention, who had so tactfully resigned the pleasure of her company? Marie's mind, quick again to the obvious, fastened on this question.

Bernadette, under friendly pressure, rose from a hope to an intention. "I will come to the first night," she declared. "I will if I possibly can."

"Now is that a promise, Mrs. Lisle?" asked Joe eagerly. After all, the farce was his discovery, in a special sense his property. He had the best right to a paternal pride in it.

"It's a promise, with a condition," said Arthur, laughing. "She will—if she can. Now I don't think promises like that are worth much. Do you, Marie?"

"It's the most prudent sort of promise to give."

"Yes, but it never contents a man," Bernadette complained. "Men are so exacting and so—so tempestuous." She broke into a little laugh, rather fretful.

"Now am I tempestuous?" Arthur asked, with a protesting gesture of his hands.

"Oh, you're not all the world, Arthur," she told him, just a little scornfully, but with a consoling pat on the arm. "You know what I mean, Miss Sarradet? They want things so definite—all in black and white! And if they can't have them like that, they tell you you're a shillyshallying sort of person without a mind and, as I say, get tempestuous about it."

Joe had regained some of his self-confidence. "If anybody bothers you like that, just you send him to me, Mrs. Lisle. I'll settle him!" His manner conveyed a jocose ferocity.

"I wish you would! I mean, I wonder if you could. They talk as if one's mind only existed to be made up—like a prescription. One's mind isn't a medicine! It's a—a—What is it, Arthur?"

"It's a faculty given us for the agreeable contemplation and appreciation of the world."

"Quite right!" declared Bernadette in emphatic approval. "That's exactly what I think."

"It would clearly promote your agreeable appreciation of the world to come to our first night, Mrs. Lisle," urged Joe.

"Of course it would——"

"So you'll come?"

"Yes, I'll come—if I possibly can," said Bernadette.

They all began to laugh. Bernadette joined in. "Back to where we began—just like a woman!" exclaimed Arthur.

"There—that's just what I mean, Miss Sarradet. He's begun to bully!"

"Well, I must. Because why shouldn't you be able to come, you see?"

She looked at him, pursing up her smiling lips. "Circumstances, Cousin Arthur!" And she pushed back her chair from the table.

"Oh, rot! And, I say, don't go, Bernadette!"

"I must. I'm awfully sorry to. You're all so nice."

"And if you possibly can, Mrs. Lisle? D.V.? That kind of thing, you know?"

"Unless circumstances absolutely prevent!" she playfully promised for the last time, as she turned away, Arthur following to put her in her carriage.

Joe Halliday drew a long breath. "Well now, girls, how's that for high?"

"Why, her hat alone must have——" Amabel began, with every appearance of meaning to expatiate.

"I wonder what she's really like!" said Marie thoughtfully.

"She's really like an angel—down to the last feather!" Joe declared with an emphasis which overbore contradiction.

CHAPTER XIII

SETTLED

Le château qui parle et la femme qui écoute—Bernadette Lisle had begun to be conscious of the truth contained in the proverb, and to recognise where she had made her great mistake. Though Oliver Wyse had told her that he was in love with her, she had allowed him to go on coming to the house as usual; and she had not even explicitly barred the dangerous topic. Little use if she had! To keep him on the other side of the hall-door was really the only way. But, though startled and frightened, she had not been affronted; though rejecting his suit, she had been curious and excited about it. It was a complication indeed; but it cut across a home-life which had not complications of that kind enough, in which nobody catered for her emotions; she had to look somewhere outside for that. A lover makes a woman very interesting to herself. He casts a new light on familiar things; he turns disagreeables into tragedies, routine into slavery, placid affection into neglect. He converts whims into aspirations, freaks into instincts, selfishness into the realisation of self. All this with no willing hypocrisy, not at all meaning to tell her lies. He is simply making her see herself as he sees her, to behold with him her transfiguration.

Oliver Wyse was lucky in that he had more truth on his side than many a lover can boast. Her life was starved of great things; she was in a sense wasted; her youth and beauty, things that pass, were passing with no worthy scope; where the sweetest intimacy should be, there was none; her marriage was a misfit. It could not be denied that she had contrived, in spite of these unpromising facts, to be fairly happy. But that was before her eyes were open, he hinted, before she had looked on the transfiguration, before she knew her true self. She supposed that must be so, though with an obstinate feeling that she might manage to be fairly happy again, if only he and his transfiguration would go away—or if she might just look at it, and wonder, and admire, without being committed to the drastic steps which lovers expect of the transfigurations they have made. Is it absolutely necessary to throw your cap over the mill just because somebody at last really understands and appreciates you? That was a question Bernadette often asked herself—quite fretfully. The action was threatened by so many penalties, spiritual and worldly.

She had her shrewdness also, increased by the experience of a beauty, who has seen many aspire in golden ardour, sigh in piteous failure, and presently ride away on another chase with remarkably cheerful countenances. If this after failure, what after success? Men were tempestuous in wooing; what were they when the fight was won? She knew about her husband, of course, but she meant real men—so her thoughts perilously put a contrast.

"Have you often been in love, Sir Christopher?" she asked the old Judge one day as he sat in her little den, sipping tea and smoking cigarettes.

He was a lifelong bachelor. "Often, Bernadette."

"Now, tell me," she said, leaning towards him with a knitted brow and a mighty serious look. "Of all the women you've been in love with, is there anyone you now wish you'd married?"

"Yes, certainly. Two."

"Out of how many?"

"I don't know. A matter of double figures, I'm afraid." Smiling, he put an apologetic note into his voice. "They're not the two I was most desperate about, Bernadette."

"Of course I should very much like to know who they were."

"But since, of course, that's impossible, let us continue the discussion in the abstract."

"Why didn't you marry them—well, one of them, I mean, anyhow?"

"Is that the abstract? Well, one of them refused."

"To marry you?"

"She refused, Bernadette. Now please go back to the abstract."

"Without asking about the other?"

"I'm afraid so."

"All right. I don't think I care so much about desperation myself, you know."

"Seen too much of it probably!" His old blue eyes twinkled.

"I could have fallen awfully in love with you, Judge. Do you often think about those two?"

"Oftener about the others."

"That's very perverse of you."

"The whole thing's infernally perverse," said the Judge.

"However I suppose you've pretty well forgotten about the whole thing now?"

"The deuce you do!"

"Did you soon get to be glad you hadn't married them—the other twenty or so?"

"That varied. Besides, if I had married them, I might have become quite content."

"They'd have got to look older, of course," Bernadette reflected. "But people ought to be content with—well, with being content, oughtn't they?"

"Well, you see, you're generally young when you're in love—comparatively, at all events. You get content with being content—as you neatly put it—rather later."

"That means you're not in love any more?"

"Life has its stages, Bernadette."

She gave a quick little shiver. "Horrid!"

"And children come, bringing all sorts of ties. That must make a difference." The old man sighed lightly, clasping together his thin hands with their gleaming rings.

"Oh, a tremendous difference, of course," Bernadette made orthodox reply.

In effect just what she had said to Oliver Wyse himself when she lunched with him at the Lancaster! "Among other things, you forget Margaret," she had said, reinforcing her resistance with every plea which came to her hand. "I don't forget her, but I think first of all of you," had been his reply. It was no doubt true that he thought of her before the child; whether he thought of her first of all was much more open to question. "She depends on me so much," she had urged, sounding even to herself rather conventional. Did little Margaret really depend on her so much—that demure prim child, self-centred, busy in a world of her own with her fancies and her toys? She was shy and reserved, she neither gave nor seemed to expect demonstrations of affection. She was her father's daughter and promised to grow up like him in mind, as she already showed a physical likeness. The natural bond existed between mother and child and was felt. It was not strengthened by any congeniality of disposition, nor by the tender appeal of frailty or sickness—despite that doctor's advice, Margaret was robust and healthy. They did not see much of one another really, not even at Hilsey. There was so much to do. Bernadette was not a habit in her child's life and doings; she was an interlude, and probably not seldom an interruption. Still there they were—mother and child. And the child would grow up, understand, and remember. No woman could make light of all that; if Oliver thought she could, he did her gross injustice. No, he who loved her would not do her wrong. Then he must understand that duty to the child was a great thing with her. And yet he said there ought to be a greater!

At the back of her mind, unacknowledged, was a thought which offered a sop to conscience. She would not be leaving Margaret to strangers. Besides the father, there would be Judith. The little girl was very fond of Judith, and Judith of her. They seemed to understand one another; Margaret's tranquil demureness fitted in with Judith's dry humour and unemotional ways. The natural thing—under certain circumstances—would be for Judith to take over the charge of her uncle's house. "Just as if I were to die, you know," thought Bernadette.

Besides, all this assumed that she would go away. Of course Oliver wanted that, but—well, lots of women didn't. Nice women too, some of them, and good mothers. She could think of two or three at least among her own acquaintance, and recognised now, with a sort of surprise and relief, that she had never thought very particularly the worse of them for their peccadillo; she had never shunned their society. Who did—although everybody knew the facts? It was odd what a difference there was between the official view (so to speak) and the way people actually behaved about the matter; Oliver had been quite right on that point—and even rather amusing.

She was seeing Oliver Wyse almost daily now, and their meeting was the event of the day to her—anticipated, waited for, feared. Everything else stood in relation to it—as a means or a hindrance, as a dull contrast or a merciful relief. He found her eager and excited, he left her often weary and fretful; but by the next day she was eager again. She was like a man who drinks himself into a headache and sadly grows sober, only to drink once more.

The eve of the household's departure to the country had come. They were to go on the morrow; as matters were arranged, Oliver Wyse would join them two days later. After another ten days, Arthur was due at Hilsey for his visit, and two or three friends besides for a week-end. So stood the programme—externally. But one point in it still hung in doubt, even externally. Sir Oliver had a competing engagement—some important business on the Continent; should he give up the business and come to Hilsey? Or the other way? He put the question to her, when he came to take leave of her—whether for three days, or for how much longer?

The time had passed when he could say, "It will wait." That had been right when he said it; to hurry matters then would have been to fail. But she had been brought to a point when a decision could be risked. Risked it must be, not only because his feelings ardently demanded an end to his suit, but lest he should become ridiculous in his own eyes. Dangling and philandering were not to his taste. He had got a dangerous notion into his head—that she would keep him hanging on and off to the end of the chapter. He had often seen men cheated like that, and had laughed at them.

His passion was strong in him now, but his masculine pride was equal to fighting it. He had himself on the curb. He could and would leave her unless he could stay on his own terms. To tell her that might involve cruelty to her; he did not stand on the scruple. There were scruples enough and to spare, if a man began to reckon them, in an affair of this kind. They were in the nature of the case. What animal can live and thrive that does not add cunning to courage, trickery to daring? He liked neither being cruel to her nor tricking those about her; but for the moment these things had to be done. There should be an end of them soon; he promised himself that and found comfort in the promise.

But she fought him with a pertinacity that surprised him; he had not in his heart expected so stout a resistance.

"It's not in the least for me to decide whether you come to Hilsey or not," she told him roundly. "It's entirely for you. I ask you to pay me a visit. Come or not as you like, Sir Oliver."

"But what does it mean if I do come?"

"I don't know. I'm not a prophet."

He put on no melodramatic airs. His manner was quiet and friendly still. "You're a very provoking woman." He smiled. "I hate to be abrupt—well, I don't think I have been—but this thing's got to be settled."

"Has it? Who says so? What is there to settle?"

"You're being tempestuous now." He threw her own word back at her, with a laugh. "And you know quite well what there is to settle." He looked at her stormy little face with love and tender amusement. But his answer he meant to have.

"Settle, settle, settle! How many thousand times have you used that word? I think I hate you, Sir Oliver."

"I begin to think myself that you don't love me. So I'd best be off on my business."

"Yes, I really think you had. And when you come back, perhaps we can consider——"

"Oh, dear me, no, we can't!"

She looked at him for an instant. Again he made her eyes dim. He hated himself at the moment, but it seemed to him that there was nothing to do but stick to his course. Else, whatever he felt now, he would feel to-morrow that she had fooled him. She sat looking very forlorn, her handkerchief clenched in her hand, ready to wipe away the tears. He went and leant over her.

"Dearest, forgive me. You must think how I feel. Can't you love and trust me?"

She thrust her hand confidingly into his: "I think I wish you'd just be friends, Oliver."

An impulse of remorse struck him. "I think I wish I could," he said ruefully.

"Then why not?"

"Oh, you don't understand—and I think you can't love me."

"Yes, I do. I'm sure I do."

He bent down and kissed her. She was thinking, and let the caress pass as though unnoticed.

"I don't think I could manage life now without you."

"Well, doesn't that mean—? Come, it just needs a little courage."

"Oh, don't talk as if I were going to the dentist's!" But she gave the hand she held an affectionate squeeze; her anger had passed. "I suppose I've got to do it," she went on. "I suppose I have. It's rather an awful thing, but I'm—I'm in a corner. Because I do love you—and, yes, I'm a coward. It's such an awful plunge, and there's—oh, everything against it! Except just you, of course. Oliver, I don't think I can come away."

He said nothing; he gently pressed her hand in encouragement.

She looked up at him and whispered, "Must I come away—now, directly?"

"Soon at all events."

"I must go down to Hilsey to—to see Margaret, you know, and——"

"Well, go. Make an excuse to come up from there, and I'll meet you."

"As if I should dare to do it without you to help me! You must come to Hilsey too, Oliver, and we—we'll start from there."

It was a fluttering faltering consent, but a consent it was; though still deferred, it was definite. It agreed not only to give him what he wanted, but to give it in the way he liked—openly, before the world. The short delay—to be spent largely in her company—weighed lightly against all this. He caught her in his arms in gratitude and passion, pouring out endearing words, beyond himself in exultation because "it was settled."

Now at last she too was moved to the depths of her nature. She sat clinging to him, with his strong arms about her, very quiet, smiling, yet drawing her breath in long low pants, her dim eyes very tender and never leaving his. So she heard his half-whispered protestations and encouragement, smiling at them, just now and then murmuring a faint "Yes." Her fears were silenced, her scruples scattered to the winds while she sat thus.

It was strange when that same evening (on which, she thanked heaven, she had no engagement) she sat—quite otherwise—at the head of her table with her husband opposite, Judith Arden and Arthur Lisle on either side—a little family party, a little domestic structure, so to say, of which she was the keystone and which she was about to shatter. Yet it seemed so firm, so habitual, the manner of its life so inveterate. Even Arthur, the latest comer, was like a native part of it now. Its permanence had looked so assured a few short weeks ago, when Oliver's infatuation was a thing to smile over in amused secrecy. But it was not permanent. She was going, by an arbitrary exercise of power, to end it. Nay, she was going to end herself, the self she had been all these last years—Godfrey's wife, Margaret's mother, Mrs. Lisle of Hilsey and of Hill Street, W. This woman, with all her various functions and relations, was going to disappear, like a bit of fluff blown into the air. Enter—through a somewhat stormy passage—a new woman, utterly different and conditioned absolutely otherwise, a person of whom Mrs. Lisle really knew very little, though she reached out to the comprehension of her and to the vision of her life with an ache of curiosity.

The other three—that all unconscious trio—were in good spirits. Even Godfrey was cheerful at the prospect of escaping from London and talked quite gaily. Judith was looking forward to seeing Margaret and to the country pursuits she loved; her talk was of riding, fishing, and tennis. Arthur was gleeful; the short separation seemed but to flavour the prospect of long and blissful days at Hilsey. Bernadette herself was the most silent of the party, a thing quite contrary to her wont. She sat there with a queer attractive sense of power—in kind perhaps like what they say has sometimes tempted men to secret murder—as though she dispensed fate to her companions and disposed of their lives, though they knew nothing of it. About them, even as about the new woman who was to come into being, her dominant feeling was not compunction but curiosity. How would they take it? Imagine them at dinner at Hilsey—say this day three weeks or this day month! Three, not four, at table, and Mrs. Lisle of Hilsey not merely not there, but for all purposes important for them non-existent! An exultation mingled now with her eager curiosity. She marvelled that she had courage to wave the mystic wand which was to destroy the structure. She looked on the three with an ironical pity.

"Well, you all sound as if you were going to enjoy yourselves," she said, at last breaking her silence. "Have you made any plans for me?"

"You always like the garden, don't you, Bernadette?" Godfrey's tone was propitiatory.

"Oh, you must play tennis this year—and there'll be the new car!" said Judith.

"Among other things, you're going to play golf with me. You promised! The links are only about eight miles off. We can motor over and make a jolly long day of it." Arthur's sentence would have gained significance by the addition of one more word—"together."

"I see you've settled it all among you," she said. "But aren't you forgetting our guest? While you and I are doing all this, what's to become of Sir Oliver?"

Arthur looked round the table with brows raised and a gaily impudent smile. He felt pretty safe of the sympathy of two of his audience; he was confident that the third would pardon his presumption because of the hint that lay beneath it—the hint that anything which interfered with long days together would be unwelcome.

"For my part, I can't think what you want with your old Sir Oliver at all," he said.

His speech came as a cap to the situation, a savoury titbit for her ironical humour. She looked at him for a moment with eyes that sparkled maliciously; then she broke into low long laughter. She seemed unable to stop or control it. She sat and laughed at all of them—and most of all at Cousin Arthur. He—they—it—all too absurd!

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she gasped at last, for their faces began to grow astonished. "But it strikes me as very funny. If he could hear you! Because he thinks a good deal of himself, you know—my old Sir Oliver!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE WITH MR. TIDDES

The next day there occurred to Arthur Lisle—whose mind was a thousand miles away from such things—a most unexpected event. The news of it came by telephone from Henry, who ventured to bespeak Mr. Lisle's immediate attention; he was not quite sure that he would get it, so reprehensibly neglectful had Mr. Lisle's professional conduct been of late. A brief had arrived, not somebody else's to be 'held,' but actually for Arthur himself—a brief in the Westminster County Court. The case would come on for trial in two days' time.

His first impulse was to send the brief back, to fly from it; not so much now because it frightened him as because it clashed with the whole present temper of his mind. But full as he was of fancies and vanities, he had somewhere a residuum of sober sense. Did he really mean to turn his back on work, to abandon his profession? Not merely to neglect preparation and opportunities, as he had been doing, but to refuse work actually there? That was a different thing—a decision too momentous. If he refused this brief, he would scarcely dare to show himself at his chambers, to

face Henry again. He braced himself up, and in a mixture of apprehension, annoyance, and surprise, took his way to the Temple—instead of going down to Wimbledon to watch lawn-tennis.

Henry welcomed the Prodigal, quite forgetful apparently of that unfortunate episode of the Law Reports. "It's from Wills and Mayne," he said. "Mr. Mayne brought it himself, and said a clerk would be at the court on Friday to look after you."

"But who are they? Do you know them, Henry?"

"No, sir, I never heard of them. They're not clients of Mr. Norton Ward's. But Mr. Mayne seemed to know about you. A shortish gentleman, grey and rather bald—one of his eyelids sort o' trembles, something like as if he was winking."

"Hum!" He did not identify the stranger. "How the deuce did they ever hear of me?" Because although Arthur might have been cutting a figure in society, and certainly was a person to whom notable things of a romantic order had been happening, he was, as a member of the Bar, very young and monstrously insignificant. "Well, it beats me!" he confessed as he untied the tape which fastened *Tiddes v. the Universal Omnibus Company, Ltd.*.

Mr. Tiddes, it appeared (for of course Arthur dashed at the brief and read it without a moment's delay), had a grievance against the Universal Omnibus Company, Ltd., in that they had restarted their 'bus while he was still in process of alighting, thereby causing him to fall in the roadway, to sprain his thumb, bark his knee, and tear his trousers, in respect of which wrongs and lesions he claimed forty pounds in damages. The Omnibus Company said—well, according to their solicitors, Messrs. Wills and Mayne, they did not seem to have very much to say. They observed that their clients were much exposed to actions of this sort and made it their policy to defend them whenever possible. The incident, or accident, occurred late on Saturday night; Mr. Tiddes had been in company with a lady (whom he left in the 'bus), and had struck the conductor as being very animated in his demeanour. Counsel would make such use of these facts as his discretion dictated. In short, a knowledge of our national habits made falling off a 'bus late on Saturday night in itself a suspicious circumstance. Add the lady, and you added suspicion also. Add an animated demeanour, and the line of cross-examination was clearly indicated to counsel for the defendants.

Not a clerk but Mr. Mayne himself met Arthur at the court; he was recognisable at once by the tremor of his eyelid—like a tiny wink, a recurring decimal of a wink. He was, it seemed, rather pessimistic; he said it was a class of case that the Company must fight—"Better lose than not defend"—and Mr. Lisle must do his best. Of course the jury—and plaintiff had naturally elected to have a jury—would find against the Company if they could; however Mr. Lisle must do his best. Arthur said he would. He longed to ask Mr. Mayne how the deuce the firm had ever heard of him, but judiciously refrained from thus emphasising his own obscurity. Also he strove not to look frightened.

He was frightened, but not so frightened as he would have been in the High Court. Things were more homely, less august. There was no row of counsel, idle and critical. His Honour had not the terrors of Pretyman, J., and counsel for the plaintiff was also young at the job, though not so raw as Arthur. But the really lucky thing was that Mr. Tiddes himself made Arthur furiously angry. He was a young man, underbred but most insufferably conceited; he gave his evidence-in-chief in a jaunty facetious way, evidently wishing to be considered a great buck and very much of a ladies' man. With this air he told how he had spent the Saturday half-holiday—he was in the drapery line—at a cricket-match, had met the young lady—Miss Silcock her name was—by appointment at a tea-shop, had gone with her to a "Cinema," had entertained her to a modest supper, and in her company mounted the 'bus. It was at her own request that he got out, leaving her to go home unattended. His manner conveyed that Miss Silcock's had been a stolen spree. Then came his story of the accident, his physical sufferings, his doctor's bill, and his tailor's account; finally the hard-hearted and uncompromising attitude of the Company was duly exhibited.

Arthur rose to cross-examine—the moment of a thousand dreams and fears.

"Now, Mr. Tiddes——" he began.

"*At* your service, sir," interposed Mr. Tiddes in jaunty and jocular defiance.

"I want to follow you through this very pleasant evening which you seem to have had. I'm sure we're all very sorry that it ended badly."

"Very unselfish of *you* to look at it like that, Mr. Lisle," said His Honour. (Laughter in Court.)

Follow Mr. Tiddes he did through every incident of the evening, with a curiosity especially directed towards the refreshments of which Mr. Tiddes had partaken. With subtle cunning he suggested that in such company as he had been privileged to enjoy Mr. Tiddes would be lavish—his hand would know no stint. As a matter of fact, Mr. Tiddes appeared to have done things well. The "tea-shop" sold other commodities, such as a glass of port. Next door to the "Cinema" was a saloon buffet and Mr. Tiddes admitted a visit. At supper they naturally took something—in fact bottled ale for Miss Silcock, and whiskey-and-soda for Mr. Tiddes.

"One whiskey and soda?" asked counsel for the defence.

"Yes, one," said Mr. Tiddes. "At least I think so. Well—I believe I did have a split, besides."

"Split whiskey or split soda?" (Laughter in Court.)

His Honour lolled back in his chair, smiling. Evidently he thought somebody a fool, but Arthur could not be sure whether it was himself or Mr. Tiddes. But he did not much care. He had

warmed to his work, he had forgotten his fears. He could not bear that Mr. Tiddes should defeat him; it had become a battle between them. Once or twice Mr. Tiddes had winced, as over that 'split'—an arrow in the joints of his harness! He was less jaunty, less facetious.

At last they got to the accident. Here Mr. Tiddes was very firm. He made no concessions; he walked (so he maintained) from his place in a perfectly quiet, sober, and business-like manner, and in like manner was about to descend from the 'bus when—on it moved and he was jerked violently off! If the conductor said anything to the contrary—well, the conductor was not looking at the critical moment; he was collecting somebody's fare.

"You didn't even look back at the young lady over your shoulder?"

"I did not, sir." Mr. Tiddes too was, by now, rather angry.

"Didn't kiss your hand or anything of that sort?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir."

"In fact you were attending entirely to what you were doing?"

"I was."

"Don't you think, then, that it's rather odd that you should have been jerked off?"

"The 'bus moved suddenly, and that jerked me off."

"But you were holding on, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was holding on all right."

So they went on wrangling, till His Honour ended it by remarking, "Well, we've got his story, I think, Mr. Lisle. You will have your opportunity of commenting on it, of course." Upon which Arthur sat down promptly.

But he was dissatisfied. It was no more than a drawn battle with Mr. Tiddes. If Mr. Tiddes's refreshments had been shown to border on excess, there was nothing to show that they had affected the clearness of his mind or the stability of his legs. That was what Arthur was fishing for—and pure fishing it was, for the conductor had in fact had his back turned at the critical moment when Mr. Tiddes left the 'bus—somehow. Also he was between Mr. Tiddes and the only other passenger (Miss Silcock herself excepted). He had reached backwards to give the signal to start—assuming that Mr. Tiddes was already safely off. Negligent, perhaps—but why was Mr. Tiddes not safely off by then? That question stuck in Arthur's mind; but he had got no answer to it out of Mr. Tiddes. The plaintiff insisted that no human being could have got off in the time allowed by that negligent conductor.

Miss Silcock confirmed her friend's story, but in rather a sulky way. It was not pleasant to have the stolen spree dragged to light; she had "had words" with her mother, to whom she had originally represented the companion of her evening as belonging to the gentler sex; she was secretly of opinion that a true gentleman would have forgone his action in such circumstances. Arthur had hopes of Miss Silcock and treated her very gently—no suggestion whatever that her conduct was other than perfectly ladylike! Miss Silcock was quite in a good humour with him when they got to the moment when Mr. Tiddes bade her good night.

"You were at the far end of the 'bus. He said good night, and walked past the conductor?"

"Yes."

"When did the 'bus stop?"

"When he was about half-way to the door."

"What did he do?"

"Walked to the door."

"Had the 'bus started again by then?"

"No."

"You could see him all the time? Where was he when the 'bus started again?"

"On the platform outside the door."

"Was he holding on to anything?"

Miss Silcock looked a little flustered. "I don't remember."

"Oh, but try, Miss Silcock," said His Honour soothingly, but sitting up straight in his chair again.

"Well, no, I don't think he was. He'd turned round."

"Oh, he *had* turned round!" said Arthur, with a quite artistic glance at the jury.

"Well, he just turned and smiled at me—sort o' smiled good night."

"Of course! Very natural he should!"

"But he didn't seem to remember having done it," observed His Honour.

"Did he do anything besides smile at you?" asked Arthur.

"No, I don't think——" She smiled and hesitated a moment.

"Think again, Miss Silcock. You'd had a very pleasant evening together, you know."

Miss Silcock blushed a little, but was by no means displeased. "Well, he did cut a sort of caper—silly-like," she admitted.

"Oh, did he? Could you show us what it was like?"

"I couldn't *show* you," answered Miss Silcock, with a slight giggle and a little more blush. "He lifted up one leg and kind of wiggled it in the air, and——"

"Just then the 'bus went on again, is that it?"

"Well, just about then, yes." Miss Silcock had caught a look—such a look!—from her friend, and suddenly became reluctant.

"While he was on one leg?"

Miss Silcock, turned frightened and remorseful, was silent.

"Answer the question, please," said His Honour.

"Well, I suppose so. Yes."

"Thank you, Miss Silcock. No more questions."

Re-examination could not mend matters. The evidence for the defence came to very little. Counsel's speeches call for no record, and His Honour did little more than observe that, where Mr. Tiddes and Miss Silcock differed, the jury might see some reason to think that Miss Silcock's memory of the occurrence was likely to be the clearer and more trustworthy of the two. The jury thought so.

"We find that the conductor started the 'bus too soon, but that the plaintiff oughtn't to have been behaving like he was," said the foreman.

"That he wouldn't have tumbled off but for that, do you mean?" asked His Honour.

After a moment's consultation, the foreman answered "Yes."

"I submit that's a verdict of contributory negligence, your Honour," said Arthur, jumping up.

"I don't think you can resist that, Mr. Cawley, can you?" His Honour asked of counsel for the plaintiff. "Judgment for the defendants with costs."

Poor Mr. Tiddes! He was purple and furious. It is sadly doubtful if he ever again gave Miss Silcock a pleasant evening-out.

The case was won. Mr. Cawley was disconsolate. "Fancy the girl letting me down like that!" he said, in mournful contemplation of the untoward triumph of truth. Mr. Mayne, winking more quickly than usual, was mildly congratulatory. "The result will be very satisfactory to the Company. Just the sort of thing which shows their policy of fighting is right! Good afternoon, Mr. Lisle, and thank you." And there was Henry, all over smiles, waiting to applaud him and to carry home his blue bag. Arthur had a suspicion that, if he had lost, Henry would have disappeared and left him to carry the bag back to the Temple himself.

He was exultant, but he was not satisfied. As he strolled back to his chambers, smoking cigarettes, a voice kept saying in his ear, "You ought to have got it out of Tiddes! You ought to have got it out of Tiddes!" Ought he? Could he? Had Tiddes been lying, or was his memory really misty? Arthur did not know even now, though he favoured the former alternative. But oughtn't he to know? Oughtn't he to have turned Mr. Tiddes inside out? He had not done it. Tiddes would have beaten him, but for Miss Silcock. True, he had persevered with Miss Silcock because his mind had gone to the mysterious point in the case—why Mr. Tiddes was just ten seconds or so too long in getting off the 'bus. But could he—or couldn't he—have been expected to think of that capering silly-like?

Between exultation and dissatisfaction his mind was tingling. He fought the fight over and over again; he was absolutely engrossed in it. He was back in the Temple before he knew it almost—sitting in his chair by the fire, with a pipe, trying to see what he could have asked, how he could have broken down Mr. Tiddes's evidence. A pure triumph might have left him pleased but careless. This defeat in victory sharpened his feelings to a keen interest and curiosity. What were the secrets of the art of wresting the truth from unwilling witnesses? The great art of cross-examination—what were its mysteries?

At any rate it was a wonderful art and a wonderful thing. Very different from the dreary reading of Law Reports! There was a fascination in the pitting of your brain against another man's—in wringing the truth (well, if what you wanted to get happened to be the truth) from his reluctant grasp. It was Battle—that's what it was.

"By Jove!" he cried within himself—indeed he could not tell whether he uttered the words out loud or not—"There's something in this beastly old business after all, if only I can stick to it!"

Oblivious for the moment of everything else, even of Hilsey, even of his adoration, he vowed that he would.

All this was the doing of quiet old Mr. Mayne with his winking eyelid. Why had he done it? That too Arthur now forgot to ask. He remembered nothing save the battle with Mr. Tiddes. He had tasted blood.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN FOR A CRISIS

Serious trouble threatened the Sarradet household also—not of the sort which impended over the Lisles, but one not less common. There was increasing strife between father and son. Raymond's taste for pleasure showed no sign of being sated; he took no warning from the scrape out of which Sidney Barslow's strong arm had rescued him; he spared neither time nor money in seeking the delights to which his youth and his temperament inclined him. Old Mr. Sarradet was ageing; he grew more grumpy and crusty, fonder of his hoards, less patient when he saw money wasted, more fearful of leaving the family business at the mercy of a spendthrift. He grumbled and scolded; he made scenes. Raymond met them with sullen hostility, or took to avoiding them by absenting himself from the house. If home were made uncomfortable, there were plenty of other places to go to! The more his father would bridle him, the more he kicked.

Marie tried to hold them together, to patch up quarrels, to arrange truces, to persuade each of them to meet the other half-way. Her task was the more difficult since she herself was held as a threat over her brother's head. She should have the hoards, she should have the business, unless Raymond would mend his ways! The old man's menace turned her brother's anger against her; almost openly he accused her of bad faith and hypocrisy—of aiming at stepping into his shoes. The charge was cruel, for she loved him. But he made a stranger and at last nearly an enemy of her. Once she had hoped to work on him through Amabel Osling, but Amabel, slighted in favour of more recent and more gaudy attractions, stood now on her dignity and would make no approaches to Raymond. She came to the house still, and was as friendly as ever to father and daughter, but distant towards the son on the rare occasions when she found him there. Joe Halliday was no use in serious straits like these; he took everything as it came, for others as well as for himself; his serenely confident, "Oh, he's a young fool, of course, but it'll come all right, you'll see," did not seem to Marie to meet the situation. And Arthur Lisle? Her old feeling forbade the idea of troubling Mr. Lisle with such matters; they would certainly grate on him. Besides, he was—somehow—a little bit of a stranger now.

It was Sidney Barslow's opportunity; he was well fitted to use the chance that circumstances gave him. The strong will which enabled him to put a curb on his own inclinations, so soon as he had an adequate motive, made him a man to turn to in distress. His past indulgences, in so far as they were known or conjectured, themselves gave him authority. He spoke of what he knew, of what he had experienced and overcome. Seeing him, the old father could not deny that young men might pass through a season of folly, and yet be sound at heart and able to steady themselves after a little while. Raymond could not call him a Puritan or an ignoramus, nor accuse him of not understanding the temptations which beset his own path.

Sidney was honest in his efforts. He felt a genuine remorse for having set young Raymond's feet on the primrose path along which they now raced at such dangerous speed. About his own little excursions along the same track he felt no such pangs of conscience; fellows were different; some could pull up when they liked; he could. It seemed that Raymond could not; therefore he repented of having started Raymond at all, and recognised a duty laid on himself of stopping him if possible. And the same motives which had enabled him to forsake the dangerous path urged him to turn Raymond also from it. Marie's approval had been his mark in the one case; in the other it was her gratitude; in both her favour. The pleasure he derived from seeing her trust him and lean on him was something quite new in his life and appealed strongly to his courageous and masculine temper. He would not fail her, any more than he had failed her brother in his need.

And his reward? He knew very well what he wanted—if only he could get it. He did not deal in doubts and hesitations. He had not sacrificed his indulgences without being quite sure of what he wanted in exchange. His mind, if primitive and unrefined, was direct and bold. His emotions were of the same simple and powerful type. Courting a girl was to him no matter of dreaming, romancing, idealising, fearing, palpitating. It was just a man seeking the mate that pleased him.

Marie was in no mood to be courted yet; her dream was too recently dispelled, and her steady nature could not leap to sudden change. But her eyes were on his strong qualities again; she looked at him less through Arthur Lisle's spectacles; that side of her which liked him could now assert itself. She turned to his aid readily, and, with her shrewd calculation seconding the impulse of friendship, made his company seem as welcome for its own sake as for the services it promised.

"You always bring a breath of comfort with you, Sidney," she told him gratefully.

Sidney was honest with her. "It's not much good. He won't listen to me any more." He shook his head in puzzle. "I can't think where he gets the money! You tell me the old man has cut off supplies, but I know he races, and I know he plays baccarat—and you may be sure he doesn't win on a balance. Besides he—well, he must get through a good bit in other ways. He must be raising the wind somehow. But it can't last."

It could not. One day old Sarradet came home from business almost collapsed. Men had come to his shop—his cherished City shop, hoary with the respectability of a hundred-and-fifty years, parading the 'Royal Warrant' of a third successive Sovereign—asking where his son was, brandishing writs, truculently presuming that Mr. Sarradet would "set the matter right." One more vicious than the rest, a jeweller, talked of false pretences and illegal pawning—not of a writ or a settlement, but of a summons or a warrant. He had been very savage, and the old man,

ashamed and terrified, had pushed him into his own private room and there heard his ultimatum—the ring and the bangle, or their value, in twenty-four hours, or an application to a magistrate. And where was Raymond? He had not been home the night before. He was not at the West End shop. The poor old fellow babbled lamentations and threats—he would not pay, he had done with the scoundrel, here was a pretty end to an honourable life! When Marie knelt by him and put her arms about him, he fairly burst into tears.

The world of reckless living and dishonest shifts—both father and daughter were strangers to it. At her wits' end Marie telephoned for Sidney Barslow. By the time he came, she had got the old man to go to bed, weeping for his son, for himself, for his money, utterly aghast at doings so mad and disastrous. A pitiful sight! She met Sidney with tears in her eyes, full of the dismal story. "What are we to do?" she wailed, quite bereft of her usual composure and courage. The thing was too difficult, too dreadful.

"The first thing is to find him," said Sidney in his quick decisive way. He looked at his watch. "It's a bit too early now; in a couple of hours' time I may be able to lay my hands on him."

"Can you really? How? Oh, I was sure you'd be able to help!"

"Well, you see, Marie, I—er—know the ropes. I think I can find him—or somebody who'll put me on his track."

"Yes, that's where you're such a help." How she was pardoning those past indulgences! In her heart she was thanking heaven for them, almost admiring them! Wrong as they were, they taught a man things which made him ever so useful to women in distress about prodigal sons and brothers, "And what will you do when you do find him?"

"Frighten him pretty well to death, if I can," Sidney answered grimly. "I fancy our friend the jeweller may turn out a blessing in disguise. The news of criminal proceedings will be a bit of a soberer. The young ass!" Because it was so easy to enjoy yourself without being involved in criminal proceedings! "But, I say, you know," he went on, "the governor'll have to pay up."

"You must persuade him. I don't believe I can, Sidney."

"Oh, you can do that right enough. After all, I don't suppose it'll break him exactly. I daresay, though, the young 'un has run into a tidy lot. Still we can square 'em, I expect. Don't look so awfully cut up, Marie."

"I was just off my head till you came." She held out both her hands for him to grasp. "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Sidney!"

"That's all right, Marie. And, look here, if I find him, I shan't bring him here. I expect he and the old man get on one another's nerves. There's a room at my place. I'll take him there. You put some things in a bag for him, and I'll take it."

"Will you? It would be better they shouldn't meet—with father as he is."

"And you may be sure that when I've got him, I won't let him go. And we'll see about the money to-morrow."

She was infinitely comforted, immensely grateful. If he had sown wild oats, what wisdom he had gleaned from the crop! A meeting between father and son just now might be the end of all things, finally fatal! She packed the bag and gave it to her trusted emissary. "What should we have done without you!" was her cry again.

"Just leave it to me," he told her, his strong thick lips set resolutely.

With the knowledge acquired in folly but tamed now to the service of wisdom, morality, and the interests of the Sarradet business, he found young Raymond without much difficulty—and found him just in time. More than money was giving out, more than strict attention to financial ethics was in jeopardy. The little excitable fellow was pretty well at the end of his tether physically also. His nerves were at breaking strain. Pleasure had become a narcotic against thought; if that alone would not serve, drink was called in as an ally. On the verge of a collapse, he was desperately postponing it by the surest way to make it in the end complete.

Sidney, robust of body and mind, beheld him with mingled pity and contempt. He himself could have lived the life for years with faculties and powers unimpaired, really not the worse for it, save in his pocket and his morals; only prudential considerations and newly awakened hopes had, on a cool calculation, turned him from it. But Raymond, if he did not land in jail first, would land in hospital speedily. Amidst the jeers and sneers of the hardier denizens of those regions, Sidney carried him to his own flat and put him to bed like a naughty worn-out child.

In the morning came the lecture. "No end of a jawing! I pitched it in hot and strong, I can tell you," Sidney subsequently reported to Marie. Poor Raymond lay in bed with a racking headache and trembling hands, and heard his sins rehearsed and (worse still) his feebleness exhibited.

"You're not the chap for this kind of thing," Sidney told him. "Chuck it, my boy! Seek milder delights. Oh, I know it's a bit my fault in the beginning. But I thought you'd a head on your shoulders and some sense in it. I'm not against a bust now and then; but this sort of rot——! And what's this fool's business about a ring and a bangle? You're in a pretty tight place there, young fellow."

Almost amid sobs the story of these unfortunate articles of jewellery—bought on credit and pawned, by and with the advice and consent of the donee, a few days later—came out. Sidney brandished the terrors of the law; the figure of the justly irate tradesman took on terrifying

proportions. If only that dread apparition, with its suggestion of policemen, of locked doors and bolts shot home, of Black Maria and picking oakum—if only that apparition could be exorcised, there was nothing Raymond would not do, promise, and abjure. Sidney jeered while he threatened and grinned while he preached, but he did both to good purpose, with all the convincing knowledge and experience of a reformed criminal at a revivalist meeting, with all the zeal of a doctor whose reputation is staked upon a cure.

Then the thorough-going long-headed man went off to his own employers and arranged to begin his approaching summer holiday immediately. That done, he tackled the writ-bearers and the fearful apparition with the aid of a sharp lawyer of his acquaintance. With threats of giving as much trouble as possible in one hand, and promises of a composition in "spot cash" in the other, the lawyer and he succeeded in reducing the claims to manageable proportions; the pawnbroker, himself a little uneasy under the lawyer's searching questions, accepted a compromise. Things could be arranged—at a price.

But the pain of that price to old Sarradet's thrifty soul! To have to subtract from his hoards instead of adding to them, sell stock instead of buying, to count himself so much the poorer instead of so much the richer—the old merchant hated it. It was Marie's task to wring the money out of him. And even when he had been brought to the point of ransoming his son, he ceased not to bewail the prospects of his beloved business.

"I won't leave it to him, I won't," he declared querulously. "I'll leave it to you, Marie."

"Oh, but I couldn't possibly manage the business, Pops," she protested, half in dismay, half laughing at the idea.

"Then you must get a husband who can."

"Never mind my husband just now. There are more pressing things than that."

An idea struck the old fellow. "I'll make it into a company. I'll clip Master Raymond's wings for him!" He pondered over this way of salvation, and, in light of its possibilities, gradually grew a little calmer.

At last the wrench was over, the money paid. It was judged to be safe for father and son to meet. Sidney brought the rescued sinner to Regent's Park. Compunction seized them at the sight of one another; the boy was so pale, shaken, and contrite; the old man was thinner, aged, and feeble. The old tenderness between them revived; each tried to console the other. Quite resolved to protect his business, Mr. Sarradet consented to forgive his son. Humbled to his soul, Raymond asked no more than to be received back into favour on any terms. Marie and Sidney stood by, helping, favouring, and exchanging glances of self-congratulation.

"I'm off for my holiday to-morrow, Mr. Sarradet," Sidney announced.

The old man looked up in sudden alarm. It was as if the anchor announced to the ship that it proposed to take a holiday.

"No, no, that's all right! I'm going for a walking tour in Wales, and Raymond's coming with me. Twenty miles a day, open air all day! Three weeks of that, and he'll be as right as rain, and ready to tackle his work like a Hercules!"

This clever fellow had a plan to meet every emergency! Surely he would have a plan to save the beloved business too? Mr. Sarradet determined to consult him about it when he came back from Wales. Meanwhile he grew much more cheerful, and even went so far as to indulge in some hints of a giddy youth of his own—hints based (in cold truth be it said) on a very slender foundation, but showing a desire to make excuses for his son.

"Yes, and your bit of fun didn't do you any harm, Mr. Sarradet, did it?" asked Sidney.

No more had his bit—though quite a large bit—done Sidney harm. There was reason then to hope that even Raymond's formidable bit might not in the end do Raymond any harm. He might turn out as good a man of business as his father yet. Still no risks should be run. The old gentleman hugged the idea of his company—and he had someone in his eye for Managing Director.

So with skill and courage, with good heart and kindliness, with ambition and cunning, Sidney Barslow bound the Sarradet family to his chariot wheels. He was the friend-in-need, the rescuer, the saviour. He was like to become the sheet-anchor, the arbiter, the referee. Between father and son—her weak old man and her weaker young one—Marie could not carry the whole load herself. She was strong and self-reliant, but she was not strong enough for that. She too would take the strong man's orders, though she might take them with a smile, when what had been and what might have been came to her remembrance.

He gave her an order now, when they said good night.

"Look here, when I bring him back from Wales, you mustn't let him mope or be bored. If I were you, I'd get Amabel to come and stay here a bit."

"Really you think of everything," she told him in a merry wonder. "I'll ask her, of course."

"I think of a good many things," he said, venturing a bold glance in her eyes.

"Don't think of too many at a time, Sidney," she warned him with a smile.

"No, no, each in its proper place! One done, t'other come on, you know!"

He stood looking down on her with a jovial confident smile—and she liked it. His bold glance of admiration did not displease or alarm her. She was quite ready to be told what the glance said;

but she was not ready to say anything in reply yet. But it was evident that some day she would be asked for a reply.

And it seemed evident too in what direction the current of her life was setting. With a smile for this and a sigh for that, and a wrinkle of the brow over this-and-that, she went back to the drawing-room and gave old Sarradet his gin-and-water.

CHAPTER XVI

A SHADOW ON THE HOUSE

"So here you are—at Hilsey at last!" said Bernadette.

"Yes, and, I say, what a jolly old place it is!" He paused for a moment. "I very nearly didn't come at all, though."

She looked at him in amused surprise. "What was the counter-attraction?"

"I had a job. Consequently it became wildly possible that I might get another."

"Oh, is that all? I hoped it was something interesting and romantic."

"It is interesting—though I suppose it's not romantic." In fact it had possessed for him some of the qualities implied by that hard-worked word. "But my clerk can wire me if anything turns up." He laughed at himself. "Nothing will, you know, but it flatters my pride to think it might."

"It won't flatter my pride if you run away from us again." She rose. "Get your hat and I'll show you round a bit. The others are all out, doing something."

"Who's here?"

"Only the Norton Wards and Sir Christopher. Sir Oliver's been here, but he had to go up on some business. He's coming back in a few days. The others are here just for the week-end."

"But I'm here for a month! Isn't that glorious?"

"Well, you know, something may happen——"

"Oh, no, I shan't be sent for. I'm sure I shan't. Anyhow I could come back, couldn't I?"

"Yes, if you wanted to. The house would always be at your disposal, Cousin Arthur." Her smile was mocking, but she laid her hand on his arm with the old suggestion of a caress, adding, "Let's get out and enjoy it, while we can, anyhow."

Bernadette looked a little pale and seemed rather tired—"run down after the season," she had explained to Esther Norton Ward when that lady commented on her appearance—but Arthur was too joyfully excited, by meeting her again and by his first view of Hilsey, to notice fine shades. It was true that he had suffered a momentary hesitation about coming—a passing spasm of conscience or ambition induced by the great case of *Tiddes v. the Universal Omnibus Company, Ltd.*—but that was all over with the sight of Bernadette and of his stock's ancestral home. To see her there was to see the jewel in its proper setting, or (to adopt Joe Halliday's hyperbole) the angel in her own paradise. As they stepped out on the lawn in front of the old house, he exclaimed, "It's beautiful, and it fits you just perfectly! You were made for one another!"

She pursed up her lips for a minute, and then laughed. "Drink it in!" she said, jeering at his enthusiasm, and perhaps at something else; the idea of an innate harmony between herself and her husband's house seemed, to say the least, far-fetched.

Whatever might be the case as to its mistress, Hilsey deserved his praises. An old manor house, not very large, but perfect in design and unimpaired by time or change, it stood surrounded by broad lawns, bordered on the south side (towards which the principal rooms faced) by a quick-running river. The pride of the garden lay in the roses and the cedar trees; amongst all the wealth of beauty these first caught the eye. Within the house, the old oak was rich in carving; the arms of the Lisles and of their brides, escutcheons and mottoes, linked past and present in an unbroken continuity. Grave gentlemen, and beauties, prim or provocative, looked down from the panels. As he saw the staid and time-laden perfection, the enshrined history, the form and presentment of his ancestors, a novel feeling came to birth in Arthur Lisle, a sense of family, of his own inalienable share in all this though he owned none of it, of its claim on him. Henceforth, wherever he dwelt, he would know this, in some way, for his true home. He confessed to his feelings laughingly: "Now I understand what it is to be a Lisle of Hilsey!"

"Imperishable glory!" But she was rather touched. "I know. I think I felt it too when Godfrey brought me here first. It is—awfully charming."

"I don't care for show-places as a rule. They expect too much of you. But this doesn't. It's just—well, appealing and insinuating, isn't it?"

"It's very genteel."

"Oh yes, it's unquestionably very genteel too!" he laughed.

The incomparable home and the incomparable cousin—his mind wedded them at once.

"It was a stroke of genius that made Godfrey choose you to—to reign here!"

Her smile was the least trifle wry now. What imp of perversity made the boy say all the things which were not, at this moment, very appropriate?

"Reigns are short—and rhapsodies seem likely to be rather long, Arthur. I think I'll go and write a letter, and leave you to simmer down a bit."

"Oh, I'm an ass, I know, but——"

"Yes, and not only about the house!" She turned to leave him, with a wave of her hand. "You'll get over all of it some day."

He watched her slender white-frocked figure as she walked across the lawn and into the porch. From there she looked back, waving her hand again; he pictured, though he could not at the distance see, the affectionate mocking little smile with which she was wont to meet his accesses of extravagant admiration, disclaiming what she accepted, ridiculing what she let him see was welcome. His memory took an enduring portrait of her there in the doorway of her home.

His heart was gay as he wandered about, "drinking it in," as Bernadette had bidden him. The sojourn before him seemed an eternity full of delight. The future beyond that month was indeed charged with interest; was there not the great farce, was there not now the strange fact of Messrs. Wills and Mayne, with whose aid imagination could play almost any trick it pleased? Still these things admitted of postponement. Arthur postponed them thoroughly, to fling himself into the flood of present happiness.

His roving steps soon brought him to the banks of the stream; he had been promised fishing there and was eager to make an inspection. But he was to make an acquaintance instead. On a bench by the water a little girl sat all by herself, nursing a doll without a head, and looking across the river with solemn steady eyes. Directly Arthur saw her face he knew her for Margaret, sole daughter of the house.

Hearing his step, the child turned towards him with a rather apprehensive look, and hastily hid the headless doll behind her back. She reminded him of her father so strongly that he smiled; there was the same shy embarrassment; the profile too was a whimsical miniature of Godfrey's, and her hair was the colour of his—it hung very straight, without curls, without life or riot in it.

"You're Margaret, aren't you?" he asked, sitting down by her. She nodded. "I'm Cousin Arthur."

"Oh yes, I knew you were coming."

"Why have you put dolly behind your back?"

"I thought you mightn't like her. Mummy says she's so ugly."

"Oh, bring her out. Let's have a look at her! How did she lose her head?"

"Patsy bit it off and ate it—at least she ate the face. It made her sick."

"Who's Patsy?" He was glad that Margaret had now put the doll back in her lap; he took that for a mark of confidence. "Is she your dog?"

"No, she's Judith's; but she lives here always and Judith doesn't. I wish Judith did."

"What's dolly's name?"

"Judith."

"I see you like Judith very much, don't you? The real Judith—as well as dolly?"

"Yes, very much. Don't you?"

"Yes, very much." And then the conversation languished. Arthur was only moderately apt with children, and Margaret's words had come slowly and with an appearance of consideration; she did not at all suggest a chatterbox. But presently she gave him a look of timid enquiry, and remarked in a deprecating way "I expect you don't like guinea-pigs. Most people don't. But if you did, I could show you mine. Only if you're sure you like guinea-pigs!"

Arthur laughed outright. For all the world, it was like the way Godfrey had invited him down to Hilsey! The same depreciation of what was offered, the same anxiety not to force an unwilling acceptance!

"Guinea-pigs! I just love them!" he exclaimed with all possible emphasis.

"Oh, well then!" said Margaret, almost resignedly, with a sort of "Your blood be on your own head" manner, as she jumped down and put her free hand into his; the other held tight hold of the headless doll. "In the kitchen-garden!"

Over the guinea-pigs he made a little progress in her good graces. She did not come out to meet a stranger with the fascinating trustfulness of some children; she had none of that confidence that she would be liked which makes liking almost inevitable. She was not pretty, though she was refined. But somehow she made an appeal to Arthur, to his chivalry—just as her father did to his generosity. Perhaps she too had not many friends, and did not hope for new ones.

When the guinea-pigs gave out, she made him no more offers and risked no more invitations. In a grave silence she led him back from the kitchen-garden to the lawn. He was silent too, and grave, except for twitching lips. He saw that she could not be "rushed" into intimacy—it would never do to toss her up in the air and catch her, for instance—but he felt that their first meeting had been a success.

A voice called from within a door adjacent to him: "Margaret, your tea's ready." The child slipped her hand out of his and ran in without a word. A minute passed, Arthur standing where he was, looking at the old house. Judith came out and greeted him.

"You've made an impression on Margaret," she told him, smiling. "She said to me, 'I've shown Cousin Arthur my guinea-pigs, and I *think* he's going to be nice.'"

"Guarded! At any rate, in the way you emphasise it."

"It's a lot from her, though, on so short an acquaintance."

He liked the look of Judith in country kit; she was dressed for exercise and conveyed an agreeable suggestion of fresh air and energy. "I'm all by myself; take me for a bit of a walk or something."

"All right. We've time for a stroll before tea—it's always late." She set off towards a little bridge which crossed the river and led to a path through the meadows towards a fir wood on rising ground beyond.

"How like the child is to Godfrey! I suppose they're very devoted to one another?"

"Well, I think they are, really. But they rather need an intermediary, all the same—somebody to tell Margaret that her father wants her, and *vice versa*. My function, Arthur—among others which you may have observed that I fulfil in the course of your study of the household."

He laughed. "I don't think I have studied it. What is there to study?"

"There's a good deal to study in every household, I expect." They had scaled the hill and stood on the edge of the wood. "There's a pretty view of the house from here," she said, turning round.

"By Jove, how jolly and—and peaceful, don't you know?—it all looks!"

Her eyes turned from the view to the young man's face. She smiled, a little in scorn, more in pity. Because he really seemed to identify the features of the landscape with the household at Hilsey Manor—a most pathetic fallacy! But he had always been blind, strangely blind, dazzled by the blaze of his adoration. Yet she liked him for his blindness, and conceived it no business of hers to open his eyes. Though they were opened to a full glare of knowledge and sorrow, how would that help?

To her own eyes there rested now a dark shadow over the house, a cloud that might burst in storm. She felt a whimsical despair about her companion. How he soared in a heaven of his own making, with an angel of his own manufacture! With what a thud he would come to earth, and how the angel would moult her wings, if a certain thing happened! Oh, what a fool he was—yet attractive in his folly! For the sake of woman, she could almost love him for the love he bore his Bernadette—who was not, by a long way, the real one.

"I'm rather glad Wyse isn't going to be here for a bit yet," said Arthur thoughtfully. "We shall be jollier by ourselves."

Queer that he should put a name so pat to the shadow which he could not see!

"I like him all right, but he'd be rather in the way, wouldn't he?"

Of a surety he was in the way—right plump in the middle of it! There was sore doubt whether the family coach could get by without a spill.

"Well, when he comes back, you mustn't expect to monopolise Bernadette."

"I don't think I ever try to do that, do I?" he asked quickly, flushing a little. "I mean, I don't set up to—well, I don't make a bore of myself, do I?"

"Goodness, no! I suppose I meant that you mustn't mind if Sir Oliver monopolises her rather."

"Oh, but I shall mind that!" cried Arthur in dismay. Then he laughed. "But I'm hanged if he shall do it! I'll put up a fight. What happened when he was here before?"

"Well, he's her friend, you see, not mine or Godfrey's. So, naturally, I suppose——"

"What did they do together?"

"Motored mostly."

"That'd mean she'd be out half the day!"

"Yes. All day sometimes."

By now they were strolling back. Arthur's spirits had fallen somewhat; this man Wyse might be a considerable bore! But then, when he was there before, there had been nobody else—no other man except Godfrey, and no other guest except Judith, who was almost one of the family. He would not find things quite the same when he came back, thought Arthur in his heart, sublimely sure that Bernadette would not ill-use him. On this reflection his spirits rose again, now spiced with combativeness. He would hold his own.

"How did he and Godfrey hit it off?"

"Oh, Godfrey just retired—you know his way."

"Into his shell? Doesn't he like Sir Oliver?"

"Does he like anybody—except me and you?" she asked, smiling ruefully. "And I think that perhaps he likes Sir Oliver rather less than most people. But it's not easy to tell what he feels."

As a fact she had been much puzzled to know what Godfrey had been thinking of late. He had said nothing to her; she would readily swear that he had said nothing to Bernadette. He had been just a little more silent, more invisible, more solitary than usual. Of what was in his mind she knew really nothing. The pall of his passivity hid it all from her sight.

It seemed to her that his passivity did more than hide him—that it must also to a great extent put him out of action, render him negligible, neutralise him, if and when it came to a fight. As an institution, as a condition, as a necessary part of a certain state of things—in fine, as being Mr. Lisle of Hilsey—he would no doubt, of necessity, receive attention. In that aspect he meant and represented much—a whole position, a whole environment, a whole life. Church and state, home and society—Godfrey the Institution touched them all. But Godfrey the man, the individual man—what consideration, what recognition could he expect if he thus effaced himself? If he put forward no claim, none would be admitted. If he made a nonentity of himself, he would be counted for naught. It might be urged that such had been the position for years, and that, with all its drawbacks, it had worked. The argument was futile now. A new and positive weight in the other scale upset the balance.

"Well, do you like Sir Oliver yourself?" asked Arthur, after some moments of silence.

She paused before answering. "Yes, I do," she said in the end. "At any rate I rather admire him. There's a sort of force about him. And—yes—I do like him too. You could trust him, I think." Then it seemed to herself that this was an odd thing which had come to her lips—under existing circumstances. It was in explanation to herself, rather than for Arthur's information, that she added, "I mean that, if he undertook anything towards you, he'd carry it out; you might rely on him."

"I don't want him to undertake anything towards me," said Arthur loftily.

"Oh, the people outside those limits must shift for themselves—I think that would be entirely Sir Oliver's view. But I'm not sure it's a wrong one, are you?" It was still with her own thoughts that she was busy. She could not quite understand why she was not more angry with Oliver Wyse. She had no doubt by now of what he wanted. Surely it ought to make her angry? She was pre-eminently Godfrey's friend—his kinswoman, not Bernadette's. She ought to be terribly angry. Even apart from moral considerations, family solidarity and friendly sympathy united to condemn the trespasser. She was loth to confess it to herself, but at the bottom of her heart she doubted if she were angry at all with Oliver Wyse. It was all so natural in him; you might almost say that he was invited. Bernadette and Godfrey between them had set up a situation that invited the intervention of a strong man who knew what he wanted. Could the one complain with justice of being tempted, or the other of being wronged? To the friend and kinswoman her own impartial mind put these searching questions.

"It's a view that I quite cheerfully accept as between Oliver Wyse and myself," said Arthur. There was a note of hostility in his voice, of readiness to accept a challenge. Then he realised that he was being absurd; he had the grace often to recognise that. He smiled as he added, "But, after all, he's done me no harm yet, has he?"

The shadow hung over the house—aye, over his own head—but he did not see it.

CHAPTER XVII

FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON!

Norton Ward on a country visit gave the impression of a locomotive engine in a siding. His repose was so obviously temporary and at the mercy of any signal. He was not moving, but his thoughts were all of movement—of his own moves, of other people's, of his counter-moves; or of his party's moves, and the other party's counter-moves. He could not at the moment be moulding and shaping his life; but, like a sculptor, he was contemplating the clay in the intervals of actual work, and planning all that he would do, so soon as he could get at it again. Even in hours of idleness he was brimful of a restless energy which, denied action for the moment, found its outlet in discussing, planning, speculating, making maps of lives, careers, and policies.

"You bring London down with you in your portmanteau, Frank!" Sir Christopher expostulated. "We might be in the Lobby instead of under the trees here on a fine Sunday morning."

The old Judge lay back in a long chair. He was looking tired, delicate, and frail, his skin pale and waxy; his hands were very thin. He had arrived cheerful but complaining of fatigue. The work of the Term had been hard; he was turned seventy, and must think of retiring—so he told his hostess.

"It's so different," he went on, "when it comes to looking back on it all, when it's all behind you. But, of course, men differ too. I never meant business to the extent you do. I've done pretty well; I won't cry down what is, after all, a fine position. It was thought rather a job, by the way, making me a judge, but I was popular and what's called a good fellow, and people swallowed the job without making a fuss. But work and what it brings have never been all the world to me. I've loved too many other things, and loved them too much."

"Oh, I know I'm a climber," laughed Norton Ward. "I can't help it. I try sometimes to get up an

interest in some dilettante business or other, but I just can't! I'm an infernal Philistine; all that sort of thing seems just waste of time to me."

"Well then, to you it is waste of time," said his wife.

"We must follow our natures, no help for it. And that's what one seems to have done when one looks back. One gets a little doubtful about Free Will, looking back."

"Yes, sir, but it's awfully hard to know what your nature is," Arthur interposed. He was lying on the grass, pulling up blades of it and tying them in knots for an amusement.

"It works of itself, I think, without your knowing much about it—till, as I say, you can look back."

"But then it's too late to do anything about it!"

"Well, so it is, unless eternity is an eternity of education, as some people say—a prospect which one's lower nature is inclined to regard with some alarm."

"No amount of it will quite spoil you, Sir Christopher," Esther assured him with an affectionate smile.

"If this life can't educate a man, what can?" asked Norton Ward.

"The view traditionally ascribed to Providence—with a most distressing corollary!"

"I think, if a fellow's come a mucker, he ought to have another chance," said Arthur.

"That's what my criminals always tell me from the dock, Mr. Lisle."

"And what women say when they run away from their husbands," added Norton Ward with a laugh. "By the way, I was talking to Elphinstone the other day about the effect this Divorce Reform movement might have if either party really took it up in earnest, and he was inclined to ——"

"Shall we hear Sir John Elphinstone's views on this beautiful morning?" asked the Judge.

Norton Ward laughed again—at himself. "Oh, I beg your pardon! But after all it is some time since we touched on anything of practical interest."

"If death and judgment aren't of practical interest, I'll be hanged if I know what is!"

"But neither of them exactly of immediate interest, Judge, we'll hope!"

"Well, what are you all talking about?" asked a voice from behind the group. Bernadette stood there, with parasol and prayer-book. She had been to church with Godfrey, Margaret, and Judith.

"Death and judgment, Bernadette," said Esther.

"Not very cheerful! You might as well have come to church, and dressed the family pew for us."

"Oh, but we were cheerful; we had just concluded that neither threatened any of us at present."

Bernadette took a seat among them, facing Arthur as he lay on the grass. She gave him a little nod of recognition; she was especially glad to find him there, it seemed to say. He smiled back at her, lazily happy, indolently enjoying the fair picture she presented.

"It's very artistic of you to go to church in the country, Bernadette," said the Judge. "It's so much the right thing. But you always do the right thing. In fact I rather expected you to go so far as to bring the parson back to lunch. That was the ritual in my early days."

"I don't overdo things, not even my duties," smiled Bernadette. She was looking very pretty, very serene, rather mischievous. None the less, the parasol and the prayer-book gave her an orthodox air; she was quite pronouncedly Mrs. Lisle of Hilsey, sitting on her own lawn. After attending to her religious duties and setting a good example, she was now entertaining her house-party.

"The others have gone for a walk before lunch, but it's much too hot for walking," she went on.

"Oh, but you promised to go for a walk with me this afternoon, you know," cried Arthur.

"We'll go and sit together somewhere instead, Arthur."

"We're warned off! That's pretty evident," laughed Norton Ward. "You shouldn't give her away before all of us, Arthur. If she does make assignations with you——"

"If she does make assignations, she keeps them—no matter who knows," said Bernadette. A little mocking smile hung persistently about her lips as she sat there, regarded by them all, the ornament of the group, the recipient of the flattery of their eyes.

"If she made one with me," said Sir Christopher, "I don't think I should be able to keep it to myself either. I should be carried away by pride, as no doubt Mr. Lisle is."

"Would you kiss and tell, Sir Christopher?" smiled Bernadette.

"Poets do—and such a kiss might make even me a poet."

"Evidently you'd better not risk it, Bernadette," laughed Arthur.

"Well, it hasn't been the usual effect of my kisses," Bernadette observed demurely.

The mischievous reference to her husband seemed obvious. It forced a smile from all of them; Esther added a reproving shake of her head.

"Perhaps it's as well, because I don't think I should like poets, not about the house, you know."

"Now tell us your ideal man, Bernadette," said the Judge.

"Oh, I'll tell each of you that in private!"

To Esther Norton Ward, who knew her well, there seemed something changed in her. She was as serene, as gay, as gracious as ever. But her manner had lost something of the absolute naturalness which had possessed so great a charm. She seemed more conscious that she exercised attraction, and more consciously to take pleasure—perhaps even a little pride—in doing it. She had never been a flirt, but now her speeches and glances were not so free from what makes flirtation, not so careless of the effect they might produce or the response which might be evoked by them. To some degree the airs of a beauty had infected her simplicity; graceful and dainty as they were, to her old friend's thinking they marred the rarer charm. She was not so childlike, not so free from guile. But Esther did not suppose that the men would notice any change; if they did, they would probably like it. For being neither willing nor able to flirt herself, she was convinced that men liked flirts. Flirts both flattered their pride and saved them trouble. Perhaps there was some truth in her theory.

For Esther's own eyes the change in Bernadette was there, whether the men saw it or not. It was not obvious or obtrusive; it was subtle. But it was also pervasive. It tinged her words and looks with a provocativeness, a challenge, a consciousness of feminine power formerly foreign to them. She had meanings where she used to have none. She took aim at her mark. She knew what she wanted to effect and used means towards it. She no longer pleased herself and left her pleasure itself to make her charming. This was not the old Bernadette, Esther thought, as she watched her dexterously, triumphantly, keeping the three men in play.

The men did notice, in varying degrees, though none with so clear a perception as the woman. Norton Ward, not quick to note subtleties in people and not curious about women, was content with thinking that Bernadette Lisle seemed in remarkably good form and spirits that Sunday—he observed on the fact at a later date. The Judge, a shrewder and more experienced observer in this line, smiled tolerantly at the way she was keeping her hand in by a flirtation with her handsome young kinsman by marriage; she was not a fool, and it would do the boy good. Arthur too saw the change, or rather felt it, as he would feel a variation in the atmosphere. He could have given no such clear account of wherein it lay as Esther had arrived at, nor any such simple explanation as served for Norton Ward or Sir Christopher. Had he been pressed, he might have said—doubtfully—that she seemed to have become more his equal, and more like other women in a way, though still infinitely more delightful. But, no man asking him to analyse his feeling, he did not attempt the vain task. The effect on him was there, whatever its explanation might be; in some vague fashion it was as though she put out a hand to raise him from the ground where he lay at her feet, his face hidden, and graciously intimated that he might kneel before her and dare to raise his eyes to hers. She treated him more as a man and less as a pet—was that it? This was the idea which came nearest to explicitness in his mind; the proud pleasure with which he looked and listened had its source in some such inkling as that. He had grown in the last few months; both actually and in his own esteem he had developed; a recognition of his progress from her would crown the delight she gave him.

She saw not only the men's admiration, amused or dazzled; she perceived also Esther's covert curiosity. She knew herself that she felt different and was being different. Esther Norton Ward knew it too! Very well, let her know. She did not know the reason yet. That she would learn hereafter. She caught Esther's pondering glance and met it with a smile of mutinous merriment; Esther might have pondered with more chance of enlightenment, had she been at Hilsey during the week that Oliver Wyse had spent there!

"Why don't you use your influence with that young man there and make him work?" asked Norton Ward of her.

"The wise woman uses her influence to make men do what they want to do, but think they oughtn't. Then they worship her, Frank."

"Oh, bosh! Henry's in despair about you, Arthur—he's pathetic!"

"I like that!" cried Arthur indignantly. "Didn't he tell you about my case? It was only in the County Court, of course, but——"

"That's it! Henry said you were very promising, if you'd only——"

"Did you win a case, Arthur? Tell us about it."

Arthur told the story of his battle with Mr. Tiddes, and how Miss Silcock betrayed the fortress.

"Splendid!" cried Bernadette, clapping her hands, her eyes all sparkling. "Arthur, you shall defend me, the first time I'm in trouble. Only I think I shall plead guilty, and throw myself on the mercy of his lordship."

"You'd get none from me, you baggage!" said Sir Christopher, who was wondering how the deuce any young fellow could resist her.

"Call witnesses to character, anyhow. We'd all come," laughed Norton Ward.

"You'd all come as witnesses to my character?" Her laugh came low but rich, hearty, charged with malicious enjoyment. "I wonder if you would!"

"Witnesses to character don't help the prisoner very much, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred convict themselves—of stupidity, which they invite the Judge to share. What they really come to say is 'We've made a mistake about this fellow all these years. He's been too clever for us!' Why should that help him? I'm very careful about letting that sort of thing interfere with my sentences."

"But oughtn't the prisoner to get a reward for past good character, Sir Christopher? Because it may not have been a case of deceiving his friends. He may have changed himself."

"Well, it's the changed man I'm sentencing. Why shouldn't he get it hot?"

"I shall not throw myself on the mercy of this particular lordship," said Bernadette. "He hasn't got any, that's obvious."

"No, you'd better get out of my jurisdiction."

"That would be the best thing to do, I think—get out of the jurisdiction." She rose with a laugh. "Also I'm going to get out of this church-going frock and into something cool and comfortable for lunch." Before she went, she had a last word for Sir Christopher. "The prisoner may have deceived himself as well as his friends, mayn't he? And he may surprise himself in the end just as much as he surprises them. Come along, Arthur, and help me to make some hock-cup before I change—Barber's no good at it."

The Judge looked after her as she walked away, attended by Arthur. "That was rather an acute remark of hers," he said.

"Yes, I wonder what made her say it!" Esther was looking puzzled and thoughtful again.

"Oh, come, we all of us make intelligent general observations at times, Esther."

"I don't think Bernadette's much given to general observations, though."

"Anyhow it's good to see her in such spirits," said Norton Ward. "Rather surprising too, since you're talking of surprises. Because between ourselves—and now that the family's out of hearing—I may say that our host is even unusually poor company just now."

"As Bernadette's very little in his company, that doesn't so much matter."

"Esther, my dear, you sound rather tart," said Sir Christopher. "Come and drink the hock-cup; it'll make you more mellow."

Bernadette's gay and malicious humour persisted through lunch, but when, according to her promise, she sat with Arthur on the seat by the river, sheltered by a tree, her mood had changed; she was very friendly, but pensive and thoughtful beyond her wont. She looked at him once or twice as if she meant to speak, but ended by saying nothing. At last she asked him whether he has seen anything of the Sarradets lately.

"Not since my lunch—when you met Marie," he answered. He was smoking his pipe and now and then throwing pebbles into the river—placidly happy.

"I liked her awfully. You musn't drop her, Arthur. She's been a good friend to you, hasn't she?"

"Oh, she's a rare good sort, Marie! I don't want to drop her, but somehow I've got out of the way of seeing so much of her. You know what I mean? I don't go where she does, and she doesn't go much where I do."

"But you could make efforts—more lunches, for instance," she suggested.

"Oh, yes, I could—sometimes I do. But—well, it's just that the course of my life has become different."

"I'm afraid the course of your life means me to a certain extent."

He laughed. "You began it, of course, when you came to Bloomsbury Street. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember all right. But I don't want you to lose your friends through me." Again she glanced at him in hesitation, but this time she spoke. "You may find me a broken reed, after all, Cousin Arthur."

He smoked for a moment, then laid down his pipe. "I'm fond of you all," he said. "You know how well Godfrey and I get on. I've made friends with Judith, and I'm making friends with Margaret. And—we're too good pals to say much—but you know what you are to me, Bernadette."

"Yes, I know, Cousin Arthur."

"So I don't know what you mean by talking about broken reeds."

She gave a little sigh, but said no more for the moment. She seemed to be on another tack when she spoke again. "It's a wonderful thing to be alive, isn't it? I don't mean just to breathe and eat and sleep, but to be alive really—to—to tingle!"

"It's a wonderful thing to see in you sometimes," he laughed. "Why, this morning, for instance, you—you seemed to be on fire with it. And for no particular reason—except, I suppose, that it was a fine day."

She smiled again as she listened, but now rather ruefully. "For no particular reason!" She could not help smiling at that. "Well, I hope I didn't scorch anybody with my fire," she said.

"You made us all madly in love with you, of course."

She gave him a little touch on the arm. "Never mind the others. You mustn't be that, Cousin Arthur."

He turned to her in honest seriousness. "As long as you'll be to me just what you are now, there's nothing to worry about. I'm perfectly content."

"But suppose I should—change?"

"I shan't suppose anything of the sort," he interrupted half-angrily. "Why should you say that?"

Her heart failed her; she could not give him further warning. Words would not come to her significant enough without being blunt and plain; that again she neither could nor would be. Something of her malice revived in her; if he could not see, he must remain blind—till the flash of the tempest smote light even into his eyes. It must be so. She gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

"A mood, I suppose! Just as I had a mood this morning—and, as you say, for no particular reason!"

CHAPTER XVIII

GOING TO RAIN!

The departure of the Norton Wards and Sir Christopher on Monday morning left Arthur alone with the family party at Hilsey Manor. To live alone with a family is a different thing from being one of a party of visitors. The masks are off; the family life is seen more intimately, the household politics reveal themselves to the intelligent outsider. During the days which intervened between his own arrival and that of Oliver Wyse, Arthur's eyes were opened to several things; and first of all to the immense importance of Judith Arden in the household. He soon found himself wondering how it got on at all in the winter, when she was not there; he had not yet known his cousins through a winter. She was in touch with all three of them; her love for animals and outdoor things made her in sympathy with the little girl; her cheerfulness and zest for enjoyment united her with Bernadette; her dry and satiric humour, as well as her interest in books, appealed to Godfrey's temper. Thus she served, as she herself had hinted to Arthur, as an intermediary, an essential go-between; she was always building bridges and filling up chasms, trying to persuade them that they had more in common than they thought, trying to make them open their hearts to one another, and distributing herself, so to say, among them in the way best calculated to serve these ends. Arthur soon observed with amusement that she aimed at distributing him also fairly among the family—now assigning him to Margaret, now contriving for him a walk with Godfrey, then relinquishing him to Bernadette for a while, and thus employing him, as she employed herself, as a link; their common liking for him was to serve as a bond of union. It was the task of a managing woman, and he would have said that he hated managing women. But it was impossible to hate Judith; she set about her task with so much humour, and took him into her confidence about it not so much in words as by quick amused glances which forbade him to resent the way she was making use of him. Very soon he was sympathising with her and endeavouring to help in her laudable endeavour after family unity.

She still persevered in it, though she had little or no hope left, and was often tempted to abandon the struggle to preserve what, save for the child's sake perhaps, seemed hardly worth preserving. Though she actually knew nothing of how matters stood between Bernadette and Oliver—nothing either of what they had done or of what they meant to do—though she had intercepted no private communication, and surprised no secret meetings, she was sure of what Oliver wanted and of what Bernadette felt. The meaning of the change that puzzled Esther Norton Ward was no riddle to her; the touch of love had awakened the instinct to coquetry and fascination; feelings long latent and idle were once more in activity, swaying the woman's soul and ruling her thoughts. Judith had little doubt of what the end would be, whether it came clandestinely, or openly, or passed from the one to the other, as such things often did. Still, so long as there was a chance, so long as she had a card to play——! She played Cousin Arthur now—for what he was worth. After all, it was for his own good too; he was a deeply interested party. When she saw that he understood her efforts, though not how urgent was the need of them, and was glad to help, her heart went out to him, and she found a new motive for the labours she had been tempted to abandon.

She got no help from Godfrey Lisle. He was sulking; no other word is so apt to describe his attitude towards the thing which threatened him. Though he did not know how far matters had or had not gone, he too had seen a change in his wife; he had watched her covertly and cautiously; he had watched Oliver Wyse. Slowly he had been driven from indifference into resentment and jealousy, as he recognised Bernadette's feelings. He tried to shut his eyes to the possibility of a crisis that would call for all the qualities which he did not possess—courage, resolution, determination, and perhaps also for an affection which he had lost, and an understanding which he had never braced himself to attain. Since he could not or dared not act, he declared that there lay on him no obligation. He hated the idea, but it was not his. It was Bernadette's—and hers the responsibility. He "declined to believe it," as people say so often of a situation with which they cannot or are afraid to grapple. He did believe it, but declining to believe it seemed at once to justify his inaction and to aggravate his wife's guilt. Thus it came about that he was fighting the impending catastrophe with no better weapon than the sulks.

At first the sulks had been passive; he had merely withdrawn himself, gone into his shell, after his old fashion. But under the influence of his grudge and his unhappiness he went further now, not of set purpose, but with an instinctive striving after the sympathy and support for which he longed, and an instinctive desire to make the object of his resentment uncomfortable. He tried to gather a party for himself, to win the members of the household to his side, to isolate Bernadette. This effort affected his manner towards her. It lost some of its former courtesy, or at least his

politeness was purely formal; he became sarcastic, disagreeable, difficult over the small questions of life which from time to time cropped up; he would call the others to witness how unreasonable Bernadette was, or to join him in ridiculing or depreciating her pursuits, her tastes, or her likings. Sometimes there was an indirect thrust at Oliver Wyse himself.

Being in the wrong on the main issue generally makes people anxious to be in the right in subsidiary matters. Bernadette, conscious of the cause of her husband's surliness, met it with perfect good-nature—behaved really like an angel under it, thought Judith with one of her bitterly humorous smiles. Arthur, a stranger to the cause of the surliness—for though he had given Oliver Wyse a thought or two on his own account, he had given him none on Godfrey's score—was troubled at it, and proportionately admired the angelic character of the response. His chivalry took fire.

"What's the matter with the old chap?" he asked Judith. "He's downright rude to her sometimes. He never used to be that."

"Something's upset him, I suppose—some little grievance. I don't think she minds, you know."

"I mind, though, especially when he seems to expect me to back him up. I'll soon show him I won't do it!"

"You'd much better not mix yourself up in it—whatever it is. It won't last long, perhaps."

"I can't stand it if it does. I shall have it out with him. The way Bernadette stands it is perfectly wonderful."

Another halo for the fair and saintly head! Judith jerked her own head impatiently. The natural woman longed to cry out: "Don't you see how clever the minx is?" Sometimes the natural woman was tempted to wish that Oliver Wyse would swoop down, carry off his prey, and end the whole situation.

But there was to be a little more of it yet, a little more time for the fascination of the new manner and the halo of imputed saintliness to work. Oliver Wyse had interrupted his visit by reason of the illness of an old uncle, to whom he had owed his start in life and whom he could not neglect. It had proved rather a long business—Bernadette read a passage from Sir Oliver's letter to the company at breakfast—but the old man was convalescent at last, and Sir Oliver would be able to leave him in three or four days more, if all went well.

"So, if I may, I'll settle provisionally to be with you next Friday," said the letter. It went on—and Bernadette also went on composedly—"So there ought to be nothing in the way of our making the motor excursion I suggested one day in the following week, if you've a mind for it then." She folded up the letter, laid it beside her, took a sip of coffee, and caught Judith's eyes regarding her with what seemed like an amused admiration. Her own glance in return was candid and simple. "I'm afraid I forget what his excursion was to be, but it doesn't matter."

"I haven't had my excursion yet," Arthur complained. "The fact is we've done hardly anything since I came."

"Well, you shall have yours to-morrow, if it's fine," Bernadette promised.

"For how long does Oliver Wyse propose to honour us?" asked Godfrey, glowering and glum at the other end of the table.

"I really don't exactly know. A week or so, I should think."

Godfrey grunted surlily. "A week too much!" the grunt plainly said. He turned to Arthur. "Yes, you'd better get your excursion while you can. When Wyse is here, we none of us get much chance at the car."

Saintliness ignored the grumble. Arthur fidgeted under it. "If you want the car, I'm sure I don't want to take it from you, Godfrey," he said rather hotly.

"Oh, I spoke in your interest. I'm not likely to be asked to go on a motor excursion!"

"You wouldn't go for the world, if you were asked," said Judith.

"It'll hold us all. Anybody can come who likes," remarked Bernadette meekly.

"That's a very pressing invitation, isn't it?" Godfrey growled to Arthur, asking his sympathy.

Little scenes like this were frequent now, though Oliver Wyse's name was not often dragged into them; Godfrey shrank from doing that often, for fear of defiance and open war. More commonly it was just a sneer at Bernadette, a "damper" administered to her merriment. But Arthur resented it all, and came to fear it, so that he no longer sought his cousin's company on walks or in his study, but left him to his own melancholy devices. The unhappy man, sensitive as he was, saw the change in a moment and hailed a new grievance; his own kinsman now his wife was setting against him!

In fact Bernadette's influence was all thrown in the other scale. It was she who prevented Arthur from open remonstrance, forbade him to be her champion, insisted that he should still, to as great a degree as his feelings would allow, be his cousin's friend and companion. She was really and honestly sorry for Godfrey, and felt a genuine compunction about him—though not an overwhelming one. Godfrey had not loved her for a long while; Oliver Wyse was not responsible for that. But she had led him to suppose that she was content with the state of affairs between them; in fact she had been pretty well content with it. Now she had changed—and proposed to act accordingly. Acting accordingly would mean not breaking his heart, but dealing a sore blow at his pride, shattering his home, upsetting his life utterly. She really wanted to soften the blow

as much as possible; if she left him, she wanted to leave him with friends—people he liked—about him; with Margaret, with Judith, and with Arthur. Then she could picture him as presently settling down comfortably enough. Perhaps there was an alloy of self-regard in this feeling—a salve to a conscience easily salved—but in the main it came of the claim of habit and old partnership, and of her natural kindliness. These carried her now beyond her first delight in the drama of the situation; that persisted and recurred, but she was also honestly trying to make the catastrophe as little of a catastrophe as was possible, consistently with the effecting of its main object. So it came about that, in these last days before Oliver Wyse arrived, she thought more about her husband than she had done for years before, and treated his surliness with a most commendable patience.

Although Arthur's relations with Godfrey had thus suffered a check, his friendship with little Margaret throve; the shy child gradually allowed him an approach to intimacy. They had rambles together, and consultations over guinea-pigs and gardening. Here Arthur saw a chance of seconding Judith's efforts after family unity. Here there was room, even in his eyes—for Bernadette, though kind and affectionate in her bearing towards the child, did not make a companion of her. Inspired by this idea, he offered a considerable sacrifice of his own inclination. When the day came for his motor excursion, he proposed to Bernadette that Margaret should be of the party. "It'll be such a tremendous treat for her to be taken with you," he said.

Bernadette was surprised, amused, just a little chagrined. In her own mind she had invested this excursion with a certain garb of romance or of sentiment. It was to be, as she reckoned, in all likelihood her last long *tête-à-tête* (the driver on the front seat did not count) with Cousin Arthur; it was to be in some sort a farewell—not to a lover indeed, but yet to a devotee. True, the devotee was not aware of that fact, but he must know that Oliver Wyse's arrival would entail a considerable interruption of his opportunities for devotion. Arthur's proposal was reassuring, of course, in regard to his feelings, for it did not seem to her that it could come from one who was in any danger of succumbing to a passion, and once or twice in these later days a suspicion that the situation might develop in that awkward fashion had made its way into her mind. Arthur must be safe enough as to that if he were ready to abandon his long *tête-à-tête*! She was really glad to think that she could dismiss the suspicion. But she was also a little disappointed over her sentimental excursion—at having it turned into what was in effect a family party. Even talk about sentiment would be at a discount with Margaret there.

"It'll be rather a long day for her, won't it?" she asked.

"It'll be such a great thing to her, and we can cut it a bit shorter," he urged.

With a slight lift of her brows and a smile Bernadette yielded. "Oh, all right, then!"

"How awfully good of you!" he cried. "How awfully good of me!" would have seemed to her an exclamation more appropriate in his mouth at the moment.

The child was sent for, to hear the great news. She came and stood dutifully by her mother's knee, and Bernadette put her arm round her waist.

"Cousin Arthur and I are going for a long drive in the car. We shall take our lunch, and eat it by the road-side, and have great fun. And you're to come with us, Margaret!"

The delighted smile which was expected (by Arthur, at least, most confidently) to illuminate the child's solemn little face did not make its appearance. After a momentary hesitation, Margaret said "Yes, mummy."

"You like to come, don't you, Margaret?"

"Yes, mummy." She looked down and fidgeted her toe on the carpet. "If you wish me to."

"No, dear, I want to know what you wish. Were you going to do something else?"

"Well, Judith had promised to take me with her to Mrs. Beard's this morning, and show me Mrs. Beard's rabbits."

The tone was undeniably wistful, whether the main attraction lay in Judith, in Mrs. Beard, or in the rabbits. The combination was a powerful one in Margaret's eyes.

"And would you rather do that than come with us?" Bernadette went on, very kindly, very gently.

The toe worked hard at the carpet.

"Do just what you like, dear. I only want you to please yourself."

"If you really don't mind, mummy, I think I would rather——"

"Very well then!" Bernadette kissed her. "Run away to Judith!"

The delighted smile came at last, as Margaret looked up in gratitude at her kind mother.

"Oh, thank you so much, mummy!" And she darted off with an unusual gleefulness.

Bernadette, her part of kind mother admirably played, looked across at Arthur. He was so crestfallen that she could not forbear from laughing. His scheme a failure, his sacrifice thwarted! The father sulked; the child, with an innocent but fatal sincerity, repelled advances. Things looked bad for the unifiers! Indeed one of them had put her foot neatly through the plan devised by the other. Judith knew about the proposed excursion; clearly she had not thought it possible that Margaret would be asked to join, or she would never have arranged the visit to Mrs. Beard.

"We're unfortunate in meeting a strong counter-attraction, Arthur. We've overrated the charms of our society, I'm afraid." Though Bernadette laughed, she spoke in dry tones, and her look was

malicious.

Arthur felt foolish. When once the scheme was a failure, it came to look futile, hopeless—and terribly obvious. Bernadette saw through it, of course; her look told him that.

"Oh, well, I suppose rabbits are——!" he murmured feebly.

"Rabbits—and Judith!" She rose and went to the window. "I rather think it's going to rain." Then after a pause she went on, "I think you're rather a conventionally minded person, Arthur."

He attempted no defence. She had seen through the scheme—oh, quite clearly! She was vexed too; she was frowning now, as she stood by the window.

"You can't have the same tastes and—and likings as people have just because you happen to be some relation or other to them. It's no use trying." She gave an impatient little shake of her head. She had not altogether liked the child's being asked; she liked no better the child's being unwilling to come. Little as she had wanted Margaret's company, it was not flattering to be postponed in her regard to rabbits—and Judith. Still, if the child did prefer rabbits and Judith—well, there was the comforting reflection that she could always have rabbits at a very moderate cost, and that there was no reason to apprehend that she would be deprived of Judith. What she valued least was the thing she was most likely to lose, as matters stood at present. Hurt vanity wrested the little girl's innocent sincerity into an argument for Bernadette's secret purpose.

"I don't like the look of that cloud. I'm sure it's going to rain."

Arthur glanced out of the window in a perfunctory way; he felt that he would have to accept Bernadette's view of the weather prospects, however subjective that view might be.

She was out of conceit with the excursion. All this "fuss"—as she expressed it in the primitive phraseology of inward reflection—spoilt it. She was rather out of humour even with Cousin Arthur. She did not mind Judith planning and scheming in the interests of family union; she was used to that and regarded it with an amused toleration. But she did not fancy Arthur's undertaking the same *rôle*. In her conception his proper attitude was that of a thorough-going partisan and nothing else. As such, he had been about to receive the tribute of that excursion. Now she was no more inclined to it. That sort of thing depended entirely on being in the mood for it. Arthur's—well, yes, Arthur's stupidity—and Margaret's—well, yes, Margaret's ungraciousness—had between them spoilt it. She felt tired of the whole thing—tired and impatient.

"I think we'll wait for a safer day, Arthur."

"All right. Just as you like." He was hurt, but felt himself in fault and attempted no protest; he knew that she was displeased with him—for the first time in all their acquaintance.

So the car was countermanded. But the next day was no safer, nor the day that followed. Then came Friday, which was otherwise dedicated. Neither as a sentimental farewell nor as a family party did that excursion ever happen.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST ENTRENCHMENT

On that Friday morning Arthur's seclusion—for thus his stay at Hilsey might be described, so remote it seemed from the rest of his life, so isolated and self-contained—was invaded by the arrival of two letters concerned with matters foreign to Hilsey and its problems or emotions.

The first he opened was from Joe Halliday and treated of the farce. Joe wrote with his usual optimism; prospects were excellent; the company which had been engaged was beyond praise. But there was a difficulty, a hitch. The producer, Mr. Langley Etheringham, a man of authority in his line, declared that the last act needed strengthening, and that he knew what would strengthen it. The author, Mr. Claud Beverley, denied that it needed strengthening and (still more vigorously) that Mr. Etheringham knew how to do it. There was friction. Joe was undecided between the two. "We three are going to meet on Sunday and have a good go at it," he wrote. "Thrash the thing out, you know, and get at a decision. I've got Claud to agree to so much after a lot of jaw—authors are silly asses, sometimes, you know. Now I want you to come up to-morrow or next day, and go through the piece with me, and then come on Sunday too. You'll bring a fresh mind to it that will, I think, be valuable—I seem to know it so well that I really can't judge it—and you've put in so much of the money that both Claud and Langley (though he's a despotic sort of gent) will be bound to listen to your opinion, whatever it is. Come if you can, old chap. I've no doubt of success anyhow, but this is rather important. Above all, we don't want Claud and Langley at loggerheads even before we begin rehearsals."

Frowning thoughtfully, Arthur proceeded to read the second letter. It came from Henry. "I beg to inform you that Messrs. Wills and Mayne rang up at two o'clock to-day to ask if you were in town. I had to say that you had been called away on business but could be here to-morrow (in accordance with your instructions). They replied that they regretted the matter could not wait. I did not therefore wire you, but I think it proper to inform you of the matter. Yours obediently——"

Appeal from Joe Halliday, plain though tacit reproach from Henry! A chance lost at the Temple! How big a chance there was no telling; there never is in such cases. A cry for help from the

Syndicate! His legitimate mistress the Law was revenging herself for his neglect; Drama, the nymph of his errant fancy, whom he had wooed at the risk of a thousand pounds (or indeed, if a true psychology be brought to bear on the transaction, of fifteen hundred), might do the like unless he hastened to her side.

Pangs of self-reproach assailed Arthur as he sat on the lawn, smoking his pipe. Moreover he was not in such perfect good humour with Hilsey as he was wont to be. The miscarriage of his excursion rankled in his mind; the perfection of his harmony with Bernadette was a trifle impaired; there had been a touch of aloofness in her manner the last two days. Godfrey was too grumpy for words. Finally, to-day Oliver Wyse was coming. Was Hilsey really so fascinating that for its *beaux yeux* a man must risk his interests, neglect his profession, and endanger, even by the difference of a hair, a dramatic success which was to outvie the triumph of *Help Me Out Quickly*? Yet he was annoyed at having to put this question to himself, at having to ask himself how he stood towards Hilsey and how Hilsey stood to him. And, down in his heart, he knew that it would be very difficult to go if Bernadette really wanted him to stay—and a very distressful departure for him if it appeared that she did not!

Judith came out of the house, crossed the lawn, and sat down in a chair opposite him. They had met earlier in the day, and greeting did not seem necessary to Arthur's preoccupied mind. He was smoking rather hard, and still frowning over his problem. Judith, on the other hand, seemed to be engaged with some secret source of amusement, although amusement of a rather sardonic order. Her mouth was twisted in a satirical smile—not at Arthur's expense, but at the expense of some person or persons unknown.

Arthur did not notice her expression, but presently he announced to her the outcome of his thoughts.

"I think I shall have to go back to town to-morrow for a bit; some business has turned up."

Her eyes met his quickly and, somehow, rather suspiciously. "Oh, don't you run away too!" she said.

"Run away too! What do you mean? Who's running away? What are you grinning at, Judith?" The word, though not complimentary, really described the character of her smile.

"Godfrey's gone to bed."

"Gone to bed? Why, he was at breakfast!"

"I know. But he says he got up feeling seedy, and now he feels worse. So he's gone to bed."

Arthur looked hard at her, and gradually smiled himself. "What's the matter with him?"

"He says he's got a bad liver attack. But I—I think he's left out the first letter."

"Left out——? Oh, no, you don't mean——?" He burst out laughing. "Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Oliveritis—that's my diagnosis. He does go to bed sometimes, you know, when—well, when the world gets too hard for him, poor Godfrey!"

"Oh, I never heard of such a thing! It can't be that! Does he hate him as much as that?"

"He doesn't like him."

"Do you think that's why he's been so grumpy lately?"

"I suppose he'd say that was the liver attack coming on, but—well, I've told you!"

"But to go to bed!" Arthur chuckled again. "Well, I am jiggered!"

"You may be jiggered as much as you like—but must you go to London?"

"Does Bernadette know he's gone to bed?" Pursuing his own train of amused wonder, Arthur did not mark Judith's question, with its note of appeal.

"I told Barber to tell her. I didn't think I should look grave enough—or perhaps Bernadette either!"

"Why, would she tumble to its being—Oliveritis?"

"She'd have her suspicions, I think. I asked you just now whether you really must go to London, Arthur."

"Well, I don't want to—though I've a slight touch of that disease of Godfrey's myself—but I suppose I ought. It's like this." He told her of the lost chance at chambers, and of Joe Halliday's summons. "It's no use going to-day," he ended, "but I expect I ought to go to-morrow."

"Yes, I expect you ought," she agreed gravely. "You mustn't miss chances because of—because of us down here."

"It isn't obvious that I'm any particular sort of use down here, is it?"

"You're of use to me anyhow, Arthur."

"To you?" He was evidently surprised at this aspect of the case.

"Yes, but you weren't thinking of me, were you? However, you are. Things aren't always easy here, as you may have observed, and it's a great comfort to have someone to help—someone to grumble to or—or to share a smile with, you know."

"That's very nice of you. You know I've always supposed you thought me rather an ass."

"Oh, in some ways, yes, of course you are!" She laughed, but not at all unpleasantly. "I should have liked to have you here through—well, through Sir Oliver."

"The chap's a bit of a nuisance, isn't he? Well, I needn't make up my mind till to-morrow. It's no use going to-day, and to-morrow's Saturday. So Sunday for the piece, and chambers on Monday! That'd be all right—especially as I've probably lost my only chance. I'll wait till to-morrow, and see how Sir Oliver shapes!" He ended with a laugh as his mind went back to Godfrey. "Gone to bed, poor old chap!"

Judith joined again in his laugh. Godfrey's course of action struck on their humour as the culmination, the supreme expression, of his attitude towards the world and its troubles. He could not fight them in the open; he took refuge from them within his fortifications. If they laid siege and the attack pressed hotly, he retreated from the outer to the inner defences. What the philosopher found in a mind free from passions—a citadel than which a man has nothing more secure whereto he can fly for refuge and there be inexpugnable—Godfrey Lisle found in a more material form. He found it in Bed!

But when Arthur went up to see his cousin, his amusement gave place, in some measure, to sympathy. Pity for his forlornness asserted itself. Godfrey insisted that he was ill; he detailed physical symptoms; he assumed a bravado about "sticking it out" till to-morrow, and not having the doctor till then, about "making an effort" to get up to-morrow. Through it all ran a suspicion that he was himself suspected. Bernadette was in the room part of the time. She too was sympathetic, very kind, and apparently without any suspicion. True that she did not look at Arthur much, but that might have been accidental, or the result of her care for her husband. If it were a sign that she could not trust herself in confidential glances, it was the only indication she gave of scepticism as to the liver attack.

At lunch-time too her admirable bearing and the presence of Margaret enforced gravity and a sympathetic attitude, though out of the patient's hearing it was possible to treat his condition with less seriousness.

"He's fanciful about himself sometimes," said Bernadette. "It's nerves partly, I expect. We must cheer him up all we can. Margaret can go and sit with him presently, and you might go up again later, Arthur. He likes to talk to you, you know. And"—She smiled—"if Godfrey's laid up, you'll have to help me with Sir Oliver. You must be host, if he can't."

Bernadette had not practised any of her new graces on Arthur since the miscarriage of the excursion; either the check to her sentiment, the little wound to her vanity, prevented her, or else she had grown too engrossed in the near prospect of Oliver Wyse's arrival. At all events the new manner had been in abeyance. She had been her old self, with her old unmeditated charm; it had lost nothing by being just a little pensive—not low-spirited, but thoughtful and gentle. She had borne herself thus towards all of them. She showed no uneasiness, no fear of being watched. She was quite simple and natural. Nor did she pretend any exaggerated indifference about Oliver. She accepted the fact that he came as her particular friend and that she was glad of his coming in that capacity. They all knew about that, of course, just as they knew that Cousin Arthur was her devotee. All simple and natural—when Oliver Wyse was not there. Arthur, who had not been at Hilsey during Sir Oliver's first visit, was still in the dark. Judith Arden had her certainty, gained from the observation of the two in the course of it—and Godfrey his gnawing suspicion.

For Bernadette, absorbed, fascinated, excited, had been a little off her guard then—and Oliver Wyse had not taken enough pains to be on his. He was not clever at the concealment and trickery which he so much disliked. His contempt for Godfrey Lisle made him refuse to credit him with either the feelings or the vigilance of a husband. He had not troubled his head much about Judith, not caring greatly whether she suspected what he felt or not; what could she do or say about it? As his power over Bernadette increased, as his assurance of victory had grown, so had the signs of them—those signs which had given Judith certainty, and the remembrance of which now drove Godfrey to that last citadel of his. But to Bernadette herself they had seemed small, perceptible indeed and welcome to her private eye, but so subtle, so minute—as mere signs are apt to seem to people who have beheld the fulness of the thing signified. She did not know herself betrayed, either by her own doing or by his.

Oliver Wyse was expected to arrive about tea-time; he was bringing his own car, as Bernadette had announced that morning at breakfast, not without a meaning glance at Godfrey—nobody need grudgingly give up the car to him this time! It was about four when Arthur again visited the invalid. He found Margaret with her father; they were both reading books, for Margaret could spell her way through a fairy-story by now, and they seemed happy and peaceful. When Arthur came in, Godfrey laid down his book readily, and received him with something more like his old welcome. In reply to enquiries he admitted that he felt rather better, but added that he meant to take no risks. "Tricky things, these liver attacks!" Arthur received the impression that he would think twice and thrice before he emerged from his refuge. He looked yellowish—very likely he had fretted himself into some little ailment—but there was about him an air of relief, almost of resignation. "At all events I needn't see the man when he comes"—so Arthur imagined Godfrey's inner feelings and smiled within himself at such weakness, at the mixture of timidity and bearishness which turned an unwelcome arrival into a real calamity, a thing to be feared and dodged. But there it was—old Godfrey's way, his idiosyncrasy; he was a good old fellow really, and one must make the best of it.

So for this hour the three were harmonious and content together. Timid yet eager questions from Margaret about fairies and giants and their varying ways, about rabbits and guinea-pigs and sundry diversities in their habits; from Godfrey a pride and interest in his little daughter which

Arthur's easy friendship with her made him less shy of displaying; Arthur's own ready and generous pleasure in encountering no more grumpiness—all these things combined to make the hour pleasant. It was almost possible to forget Oliver Wyse.

But presently Margaret's attendant came to fetch her; she was to have her tea rather early and then change her frock—in order to go downstairs and see Sir Oliver; such were mother's orders. Godfrey's face relapsed into peevishness even while the little girl was kissing him good-bye.

"Why should she be dragged down to see Wyse?" he demanded when she was gone.

"Oh, I suppose it's the usual thing. Their mothers like showing them off."

"All damned nonsense!" grumbled Godfrey, and took up his book again. But he did not read it. He looked at his watch on the table by him. "Half-past four! He'll be here directly."

"Oh, well, old chap, does it matter so much——?" Arthur had begun, when Godfrey raised himself in his bed and held up his hand.

"There's a motor-horn!" he said. "Listen, don't you hear?"

"Yes, I suppose it's him." He strolled to the window, which looked on the drive. "There is a car coming; I suppose it's his."

Godfrey let his hand drop, but sat upright for a few moments longer, listening. The car passed the window and stopped at the door.

"Yes, it's Wyse all right. The car's open. I saw him." So saying, Arthur left the window and sauntered back towards the bed, his face adorned with a well-meaning smile of common sense and consolation. But Godfrey lay down on the pillow again, and with an inarticulate grunt turned his face to the wall. Arthur stood looking at him in amazement. His smile grew grim—what a ridiculous old chap it was!

But there was no more to be got out of him just now; that was clear enough. No more welcome, no more friendly talk! The sulks were back again in full force; Godfrey was entrenched in his last citadel. On Arthur himself devolved the function of acting as Sir Oliver's host. Feeling no great desire to discharge his duties, he lounged slowly down the stairs into the hall; he was conscious of a distinct touch of Oliveritis.

The door which led from the hall to Bernadette's own room stood open. They were standing together by the window, Bernadette with her back towards Arthur. Wyse faced her, and her hand rested lightly on his arm—just as it had so often rested on Arthur's own, in the little trick of friendly caress that she had. He ought to have known just what—just how much—could properly be inferred from it; none the less he frowned to see it now. Then he noticed Oliver Wyse's face, rising over her head—for Oliver was tall—and turned downwards towards her. Arthur was in flannels and wore rubber shoes; his feet had made no sound on the carpeted stairs. His approach was unnoticed.

The next minute he was crossing the hall with determined, emphatic, highly audible steps. Slowly, as it seemed, Oliver Wyse raised his head, and slowly a smile came to his lips as he looked over Bernadette's head at the young man. Then she turned round—very quickly. She was smiling, and her eyes were bright. But something in Arthur's face attracted her attention. She flushed a little. Her voice was louder than usual, and seemed as it were hurried, when she said:

"Here's Sir Oliver safe and sound, Arthur! He's done it in two hours and twenty minutes."

"Not bad going, was it?" asked Oliver, still looking at Arthur with that cool, self-confident, urbane smile. He was not embarrassed; rather it seemed as though he were defying the intruder to embarrass him, whatever he might have seen, whatever he might be pleased to think.

But Bernadette, his adored, his hopelessly idealised Bernadette—ah, the vulgar, the contaminating suspicion!—Bernadette was looking as if she had been caught! A sudden swift current of feeling ran through him—a new feeling which made his blood hot with resentment of that confident smile.

Bernadette's confusion was but momentary. She was quite herself again, serene and at ease, as she said, "Will you show him his room? He'd like a wash before tea. He's in the Red Room—over the porch, you know."

Arthur entered on his duties as deputy-host to the urbane and smiling guest.

CHAPTER XX

A PRUDENT COUNSELLOR

Arthur escaped from the house as soon as he could, leaving Bernadette and Sir Oliver at tea together. He could not bear to be with them; he had need to be alone with his anger and bewilderment. Perhaps if he were alone for a bit he could see things better, get them in a true perspective, and make up his mind whether he was being a fool now or had been a fool—a sore fool—up to now. Which was the truth? Bernadette's confusion, if real at all, had been momentary; Sir Oliver's cool confidence had never wavered. He did not know what to think.

All its old peace and charm enveloped Hilsey that summer evening, but they could not calm the ferment of his spirit. There was war within him; the new idea clashed so terribly with all the old ones. The image of Bernadette which he had fashioned and set up rocked on its pedestal. A substitute began to form itself in his consciousness, not less fascinating—alas, no!—but very different. He could not turn his eyes from it now; it filled him with fear and anger.

He crossed the bridge and the meadows beyond it, making for the wood which crowned the hill above, walking quickly, under an impulse of restlessness, a desire to get away—though, again, the next instant he would be seized with a mad idea of going straight back and "having it out" with her, with Oliver—with somebody! Shaking it off, he would stride forward again, his whole mind enmeshed in pained perplexity. Oh, to know the truth! And yet the truth might be fearful, shattering.

The bark of a dog, short and sharp, struck on his ears. Then, "Patsy, Patsy, come here!" and a laugh. Judith was sitting on the trunk of a tree newly cut down, by the side of the path. She had a book in her lap; Patsy had been on guard beside her.

"Where are you rushing to at six miles an hour?" she asked. "You frightened Patsy."

He stopped in front of her. "Was I walking quickly? I—I'm not going anywhere in particular—just for a stroll before dinner."

"A stroll!" She laughed again, raising her brows. "Sit down for a bit, and then we'll walk back together. You look quite hot."

He sat down by her and lit a cigarette. But he did not meet her eyes. He sat staring straight before him with a frowning face, as he smoked. She made her inspection of him, unperceived herself, but she let him know the result of it. "You look rather gloomy, Arthur. Has anything happened?"

"No—Well, except that Oliver Wyse has got here—about an hour ago, before tea."

"Sir Oliver is much as usual, I suppose?"

"I suppose so. I don't know him very well, you see."

"Meeting him doesn't seem to have had a very cheering effect upon you. You look about as jolly as Hamlet."

He shook his head impatiently, but made no answer. He did look very forlorn. She patted his shoulder. "Oh, come, cheer up! Whatever it is, grouching won't help. We mustn't have you going to bed too, like Godfrey." She gave him this lead, hoping that he would take it. It seemed better to her now that he should realise the truth, or some of it.

He turned his face towards her slowly. She looked at him with grave eyes, but with a little smile —of protest, as it were, against any overdoing of the tragedy.

"What does the fellow want here?" he asked in a very low voice.

"All he can get," she answered brusquely. "That's my opinion anyhow, though I couldn't prove it."

He did not move; he looked at her still; his eyes were heavy with another question. But he dared not put it—at least not yet. "Why is he allowed to come here then?" he grumbled.

"Who's to stop him? Godfrey? From bed?"

The remembrance of Godfrey turning his face to the wall answered her question. But she went on with a repressed vehemence, "Do you suppose Godfrey needs telling? Well, then, what could I do? And I'm not sure I'd do anything if I could. I've done my best with this family, but it's pretty hopeless. Things must happen as they must, Arthur. And you've no right to hold me responsible."

"I can't understand it," he muttered slowly.

"I thought you would by now—staying in the house."

"But she'd never—let him?" His voice sank to a whisper.

"I don't know. Women do, you know. Why not Bernadette?"

"But she's not like that, not that sort," he broke out, suddenly angry again.

She turned rather hard and contemptuous. "Not that sort? She's a woman, isn't she? She's never been like that with you—that's what you really mean."

"It isn't," he declared passionately. "I've never—never had so much as a thought of anything like that."

"I know. You've made something superhuman of her. Well, Sir Oliver hasn't."

"I won't believe it of her!"

The burden of grief and desolation in his voice made Judith gentle and tender again. "Oh, I know you won't, my dear," she said, "unless you absolutely have to, absolutely must." She got up and whistled to recall her dog, which had strayed into the wood. "I must go back, or I shall be late for dinner. Are you coming, Arthur?"

"Oh, there's plenty of time. I must think what to do."

She turned away with a shrug of her shoulders. What could he do? What could anybody? Things must happen as they would—for good or evil as they would.

Things were likely to happen now, and that quickly. At the very moment when Arthur came upon

them in Bernadette's room, Oliver had been telling her of his completed plan. The yacht would be round to Southampton by the following Tuesday. They would motor over—it was within a drive of moderate length from Hilsey—go on board, and set sail over summer seas. She had turned from that vision to meet Arthur's startled eyes; hence her momentary confusion. But she was over it now. While they drank their tea, Oliver well-nigh persuaded her that it had never existed—never, at least, been visible. And besides, "What does it matter what he thinks?" Oliver urged.

To this Bernadette would not quite agree. "I don't want him to—to have any idea of it till—till the time comes," she said fretfully. "I don't want anybody to have any idea till then—least of all Arthur."

"Well, it's not for long, and we'll be very careful," he said with a laugh.

"Yes, you promised me that when I let you come back here," she reminded him eagerly.

"I know. I'll keep my word." He looked into her eyes as he repeated, "It's not for long."

If Oliver Wyse had not inspired her with a great passion—a thing that no man perhaps could create from what there was to work on in her soul—he had achieved an almost complete domination over her. He had made his standards hers, his judgments the rule and measure of her actions and thoughts. She saw through his eyes, and gave to things and people much the dimensions that he did, the importance or the unimportance. At his bidding she turned her back on her old life and looked forward—forward only. But to one thing she clung tenaciously. She had made up her mind to the crash and upheaval at Hilsey, but she had no idea of its happening while she was there; she meant to give—to risk giving—no occasion for that. Her ears should not hear nor her eyes see the fall of the structure. No sight of it, scarcely a rumbling echo, need reach her as she sailed the summer seas. Oliver himself had insisted on the great plunge, the great break; so much benefit she was entitled to get out of it.

"And be specially careful about Arthur," she urged. "Not even the slightest risk another time!"

"Confound Arthur!" he laughed good-humouredly. "Why does that boy matter so much?"

"Oh, he thinks such a lot of me, you know. And I am very fond of him. We've been awfully good friends, Oliver. At all events he does appreciate me." This was why she felt tender about Arthur, and was more sorry for him than for the others who were to suffer by what she did. She had not been enough to the others—neither to her husband nor to Margaret—but to Arthur she knew that she had been and was a great deal. Besides she could not possibly get up any case against Arthur, whatever plausible complaints she might have about the others, on the score of coldness, or indifference, or incompatibility, or sulks.

"In Arthur's presence I'll be as prim as a monk," Oliver promised her, laughing again, as she left him before dinner.

He strolled out on to the lawn, to smoke a cigarette before going to dress, and there met Judith Arden on her return from the wood.

"So you're back again, Sir Oliver!" she said, shaking hands.

"As you see. I hope you're not tired of me? It's only to be a short stay, anyhow."

The two were on a well-established footing, chosen by Judith, acquiesced in by Sir Oliver. He was pretty sure that she knew what he was about, but thought she could cause him no hindrance, even if she wished. She treated him with a cool irony that practically endorsed his opinion on both points.

"If you're anxious to be told that we're all glad to see you, I'll give you the formal assurance. I'm sorry my uncle is not well enough to welcome you himself."

"Oh, I hope he'll be up and about to-morrow. Bernadette tells me it's nothing serious."

"She ought to know, Sir Oliver, being his wife."

"The party has received an addition since I was here, I see."

"Yes. Some company for us when you and Bernadette go out motoring!"

"Do you think that the addition will be willing to fall in with that—well, that grouping?"

"Now I come to think of it, perhaps not. But there—you always get your own way, don't you?"

"If that flattery were only sincere, it would be sweet to my ears, Miss Judith."

"It's sincere enough. I didn't mean it as flattery. I spoke rather in a spirit of resignation."

"The same spirit will animate our friend perhaps—the addition, I mean."

"It may; it's rather in the air at Hilsey. But he mayn't have been here long enough to catch it. I rather think he hasn't."

"You invest the position with exciting possibilities! Unless I fight hard, I may be done out of my motor rides!"

"That would leave me calm," she flung at him over her shoulder as she went into the house.

He walked up and down a little longer, smiling to himself, well content. The prospect of the summer seas was before his eyes too. He had counted the cost of the voyage, and set it down at six months' decorous retirement—enough to let people who felt that they must be shocked be shocked at sufficient leisure. After that, he had no fear of not being able to take his place in the world again. Nor need Bernadette fear any extreme cold-shouldering from her friends. It was a

case in which everybody would be ready to make excuses, to find the thing more or less pardonable. Why, one had only to tell the story of how, on the eve of the crisis, the threatened husband took to his bed!

As Arthur watched Bernadette at dinner, serene, gracious, and affectionate—wary too by reason of that tiny slip—his suspicions seemed to his reason again incredible. Judith must be wrong, and he himself wrong also. And her friend Sir Oliver—so composed, so urbane, so full of interesting talk about odd parts of the world that he had seen and the strange things which had befallen him! Surely people who were doing or contemplating what they were suspected of could not behave like that? That must be beyond human nature? He and Judith must be wrong! But there was something within him which refused the comforting conclusion. Not the old adoration which could see no flaw in her and endure no slur on her perfection. His adoration was eager for the conclusion, and pressed him towards it with all the force of habit and preconception. It was that other, that new, current of feeling which had rushed through him when he stood in the hall and saw them framed, as it were, by the doorway of her room—a picture of lovers, whispered the new feeling, sparing his recollection no detail of pose or air or look. And lovers are very cunning, urged the new feeling, that compound of anger and fear—the fear of another's taking what a man's desire claims for himself. He had honestly protested to Judith that his adoration had been honest, pure, and without self-regard. So it had, while no one shared or threatened it. But now—how much of his anger, how much of his fear, came from loyalty to Godfrey, sorrow for Margaret, sorrow for Bernadette herself, grief for his own broken idol if this thing were true? These were good reasons and motives for fear and anger; orthodox and sound enough. But they had not the quality of what he felt—the heat, the glow, the intense sense of rivalry which now possessed him, the piercing vigilance with which he watched their every word and look and gesture. These other reasons and motives but served to aid—really was it more than to mask?—the change, the transmutation, that had set in at such a pace. Under the threat of rivalry, the generous impulse to protect became hatred of another's mastery, devotion took on the heat of passion, and jealousy lent the vision of its hundred eyes.

But Bernadette too was watchful and wary; her position gave her an added quickness of perception. Oliver's contemptuous self-confidence might notice nothing, but, as she watched the other two, the effect of his persuasions wore off; she became vaguely sensible of an atmosphere of suspicion around her. She felt herself under observation, curious and intense from Arthur, from Judith half-scornful, half-amused. And Judith seemed to keep an eye on Arthur too—rather as if she were expecting, or fearing, or waiting for something from him. Bernadette grew impatient and weary under this sense of scrutiny. Surely it was something new in Arthur? And was not Judith in some way privy to it?

"What are the plans for to-morrow?" asked Sir Oliver, as he sipped his glass of port. "Can we go motoring? I've brought my car, you know, in case yours is wanted."

"Well, we might take them both, and all go somewhere—Margaret too!" A family party seemed now an excellently prudent and unsuspicious thing. "Oh, but I forgot, there's a great cricket-match—Hilsey against Marling! I ought to put in an appearance sometime, and I expect you're wanted to play, aren't you, Arthur?"

"I believe I did tell Beard I'd play if I was wanted. I'd forgotten about it."

"Have you made up your mind about going to London to-morrow?" asked Judith.

Bernadette pricked up her ears—in pure metaphor, though; she was too alert to let any outward sign of interest appear. Yet it now seemed to her very desirable that Arthur should go to London—for a few days anyhow. The quick look of surprise with which he met Judith's question did nothing to lessen this feeling.

He had forgotten all about going to London next day! The plight of the farce, the possible briefs—Joe Halliday's appeal, and the renewed enquiry from Wills and Mayne, so flattering to professional hopes—where were they? Where are the snows of yester year? They had gone clean out of his head, out of his life again. They had become unimportant, irrelevant. Again, for the moment, Hilsey closed around him on every side.

He did not answer Judith for a moment. "You know you told me you thought you might have to," she said, "for a little while anyhow, on some business."

"Oh yes, I know. But——"

"What business, Arthur?" Bernadette asked. "Briefs? How exciting!"

"Oh, nothing in particular!"

"Nonsense! I want to hear. I'm interested. I want to know all about it."

He could not tell her with his old pleasure, his old delight at any interest she might be gracious enough to shew in his affairs; but neither could he refuse to tell. That would be a bit of useless sulking—after Godfrey's fashion. Besides, perhaps they were wrong—he and Judith. So he told her about Wills and Mayne's flattering if abortive enquiry, and how Mr. Claud Beverley and Mr. Langley Etheringham were at loggerheads over the farce. Sir Oliver, now at his cigar, listened benevolently. Bernadette fastened on the latter topic; it interested her more—she thought it probably interested Arthur more also. "That really is rather important, now! It's sort of referred to you, to your decision, isn't it? And it's awfully important, isn't it, Sir Oliver? Perhaps you don't know, though—Arthur's put a lot of money in the piece."

"Then I certainly think he'd better run up and look after it," smiled Sir Oliver. "I should."

"I don't think I shall go. I expect the thing can wait; things generally can."

"I don't think you're being very wise, Cousin Arthur," Bernadette said gently. "We shall be sorry to lose you, but if it's only for a little while, and Mr. Halliday makes such a point of it——!"

"Joe always exaggerates things."

"I like having you here—well, I needn't tell you that—but not if I have to feel that we're interfering with your work or your prospects."

Here Jealousy had a private word for Arthur's ear. "That sounds well, very nice and proper! But rather a new solicitude, isn't it? Much she used to care about your work!"

"After all, what do I know about the third acts of farces?"

"I expect that's just why they want you—in a way. You'll be like one of the public. They want to know how it strikes one of the public. Don't you think that's it, Sir Oliver?"

Sir Oliver thought so—but Jealousy was mean enough to suggest that the lady was more ingenious than convincing.

"Don't you think he ought to go, Judith?"

The ironic comedy of this conversation (started too by herself, in all innocence, purely *à propos* of the village cricket-match!) between the prudent counsellor and the idle apprentice was entirely to Judith's humour. They argued their false point so plausibly. The farce had been a great thing to him, and would be again, it was to be hoped. And to Bernadette, for his sake, it had been "exciting" and possibly—just possibly—would be again. But it was not the fate of the farce that concerned either of them now. They could not humbug her in that fashion! Her smile was mocking as she answered: "Yes, I think he'd better go, Bernadette. I'm sure you're advising him for his own good."

Bernadette gave her a quick glance, bit her lip, and rose from the table. "We'll have coffee in the drawing-room. Bring your cigar, Sir Oliver."

Sir Oliver was smiling too; that girl Judith amused him; he appreciated the dexterous little stabs of her two-edged dagger.

But Arthur was listening to another whisper in his ear: "Very anxious to get you away, isn't she? Curiously anxious!"

When Bernadette gave him his cup of coffee she said in a low voice, "Don't be foolish, Arthur. I really think you ought to go."

He looked her full in the eyes and answered, "I see you want me to, at all events."

Those whispers in his ear had done their work. He turned abruptly away from her, not seeing the sudden fear in her eyes. His voice had been full of passionate resentment.

CHAPTER XXI

IDOL AND DEVOTEE

After drinking his coffee quickly—with no word to anyone the while—Arthur had gone out of the room. Judith took up her book, Oliver Wyse was glancing at the City article in a weekly paper, Bernadette sat quiet in her high-backed arm-chair, looking very slight and young in her white evening frock, but wearing a tired and fretful expression. Just what she had planned to avoid, just what she hated, was happening or threatening to happen. She felt herself in an atmosphere of suspicion; she was confronted by accusers; she was made to witness her handiwork; the sight and the sound of the shattered edifice menaced her eyes and ears.

Glancing at her over his paper, Oliver saw that she was moody. He came and tried to draw her into talk. She received him coldly, almost peevishly. He had the tact not to press his company on her. "I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll go and polish off some letters. Then I shall be quite free for to-morrow," he said.

"Oh, yes, do, of course," she answered with what seemed relief. She was angry now with him for having come back to Hilsey, and with herself for having let him. "Will you go to the library?"

"You've given me such a delightfully comfortable room that I'll write there, I think."

"As you like, and—I'm very tired—perhaps we'd better say good-night."

He smiled and pressed her hand gently. "Very well, good-night." She gave him a glance half-penitent for her crossness, but let him go without more. Judith accorded him a curt 'Good-night,' without raising her head from her book. She was reading with wonderful industry; absorbed in the book! Bernadette interpreted this as a sign of disapproval—it was more probably a demonstration of non-responsibility for the ways of fate—but it was not Judith's disapproval that particularly engaged her thoughts. They were obstinately set on Arthur. How and what—how much—had he found out? Enough to make him resolved not to go to London, anyhow, it seemed! Enough to make him spring with swift suspicion to the conclusion that she wanted him to go for her own purposes! And yet she had been wary—and quite plausibly sage and prudent in her

counsel.

"Where's Arthur?" she asked. "He's disappeared!"

"I don't know where he is," answered Judith from behind her book.

But he was more than suspicious. He was very angry. His last brusque speech showed that, and still more the note in his voice, a note which she had never heard before. It was of more than indignation; it was of outrage. She could manage the others. Margaret presented no difficulty, the sulky helpless husband hardly more; from Judith there was to be feared nothing worse than satiric stabs. But if Arthur were going to be like this, the next three days would be very difficult—and horribly distasteful. He had touched her as well as alarmed her. Such an end to her affectionate intimacy with him was a worse wound than she had reckoned on its being. To see him angry with her hurt her; she had never meant to see it, and she was not prepared for the intensity of feeling which had found vent in his voice. It had been as bad as a blow, that speech of his; while showing him sore stricken, it had meant to strike her also. She had never thought that he would want to do that. Tender regrets, propitiating memories, an excusing and attenuating fondness—these were what she desired to be able to attribute to Arthur when she was sailing on the summer seas.

"I wonder what's become of him! Do you think he's gone out, Judith?"

At last Judith closed her book and raised her head. "Why do you want Arthur now?"

"I only wondered what could have become of him."

"Perhaps he's gone to pack—ready for to-morrow, you know."

"Oh, nonsense! Barber would pack for him, of course—if he's going."

Judith, book in hand, rose from her chair. "I think I shall go to bed." She came across the room to where Bernadette sat. "You'd better too. You look tired."

"No, I'm not sleepy. I'm sure I couldn't sleep."

Judith bent down and kissed her lightly on the cheek. "Never mind Arthur. You'd better let him alone to-night."

Bernadette longed to ask "What have you said to him?" But she would not; she shrank from bringing the matter into the open like that. It would mean a scene, she thought, and scenes she was steadfastly purposed to avoid—if possible.

"Well, he's behaving rather queerly, going on like this," she murmured peevishly.

For an instant Judith stood looking at her with a smile in which pity and derision seemed oddly mingled; then she turned on her heel and went out.

Bernadette sat on alone in the big drawing-room; it was very silent and solitary. The chill fancies of night and loneliness assailed her. Surely nobody would do anything foolish because of—well, because of what she did? She rejected the idea as absurd. But she felt uncomfortable and desolate. She might send for Sir Oliver; no doubt he was at his letters still, and it was not really late. Yet somehow she did not want him; she was not in the mood. Her mind was obstinate still, and still asked obstinately of Arthur.

At last she got up, went through the hall, and out on to the terrace. She looked up and down the length of it. The night was fine and the moon shone, but she saw no sign of him. She called his name softly; there was no reply. Either he had gone further afield, or he was in the house. She paused a moment, and then took her way along the corridor which led past the dining-room to the smoking-room—an apartment seldom used in these lax days (when every room is a smoking-room) and rather remote. Perhaps he had retreated there. She stood for a moment outside the door, hesitating at the last whether to seek him out. But some impulse in her—friendliness, remorse, fear, curiosity, all had their share in it—drove her on. Very softly she turned the handle and opened the door.

Yes, he was there. He was sitting in a chair by the table. His arms were spread on the table, the hands meeting one another, and his head rested on his hands. He did not hear the door she opened so gently. He looked as if he were asleep. Then, softly still, she closed the door, standing close by it. This time he heard the noise, slight as it was, and lifted his face from his hands. When he saw her, he slowly raised himself till he sat straight in his chair. She advanced towards him timidly, with a deprecatory smile.

In disuse the room had grown dreary, as rooms do; the furniture showed a housemaid's stiff ideas of arrangement; there was no human untidiness; even the air was rather musty.

"Oh, you don't look very cheerful in here! Have you been asleep, Arthur?" She sat herself sideways on the heavy mahogany writing-table.

He shook his head; his eyes looked very tired.

"I couldn't think what had become of you. And I wanted to say good-night. We're—we're friends, aren't we, Cousin Arthur?"

"Where's Oliver Wyse?" he asked brusquely.

"Upstairs in his room—writing letters. He went almost as soon as you did—but more politely!" Her smile made the reproof an overture to friendship.

"I hate to see the fellow with you," he broke out fiercely, but in a low voice.

"Oh, you mustn't say things like that! What nonsense have you got into your head? Sir Oliver's just a friend—as you are. Not the same quite, because you're a relation too. But still just a very good friend, as you are. Is this all because I told you you ought not to neglect your work?"

"Why are you so anxious for me to clear out?"

"If you take it like that, I can't—well, we can't talk. I must just leave you alone." She got down from the table and stood by it, ready, as it seemed, to carry out her threat of going.

"I'll go to London—if you'll tell Oliver Wyse to come with me."

"He's only just come, poor man—and only for a few days, anyhow! I think you've gone mad. Who's been putting such things in your head? Is it—Godfrey?"

"You wouldn't be surprised if it was, would you?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, I should, though Godfrey is sometimes very absurd with his fancies. I don't want to quarrel, but you really mustn't grudge my having another friend. It's not reasonable. And if Sir Oliver does admire me a little—well, is that so surprising?" She smiled coaxingly, very anxious to make friends to-night, to part friends on the morrow. "After all, aren't you a little guilty in that way yourself, Cousin Arthur?"

"Not in the same——" he began, but broke off, frowning and fretful.

"I've spoilt you, but I never promised you a monopoly. Now be good and sensible, do! Forget all this nonsense; go and do your work, and come back next week."

He made no reply to her appeal; he sat looking at her with a hostile scrutiny.

"Anyhow, you can't stay if you're going on behaving like this. It's intolerable."

"I came here on Godfrey's invitation. If Godfrey asks me to go——"

"If you appeal to Godfrey, you're not a friend of mine!" she cried hotly.

"Impossible to be a friend both of yours and of Godfrey's, is it?" he sneered.

Her face flushed; now she was very angry. "Go or stay—anyhow I've done with you!" She half-turned away, yet waited a moment still, hoping that his mood would soften.

He leant forward towards her in entreaty. "Don't do it, Bernadette, for God's sake! For your own sake, for the sake of all of us who love you!"

"Who loves me in this house?" she asked sharply and scornfully. "Am I so much to any of them? What am I to Godfrey, for instance? Does Godfrey love me?" She was glad to give utterance to her great excuse.

But his mind was not on excuses or palliation; they belonged to his old feelings about her, and it was the new feeling which governed him now. He stretched out his arm, caught one of her hands, and drew her towards him almost roughly.

"I love you, Bernadette, I love you body and soul, I worship you!"

"Arthur!" she cried in amazement, shrinking, trying to draw back.

"When I see that man with you, and know what he wants, and suspect—It drives me mad, I can't bear it. Oh, it's all damnable of me, I know! I could have gone on all right as we were, and been happy, but for this. But now, when I think of him, I——" With a shiver he let go her hands and buried his face in his own again. His shoulders shook as though with a sob, though no sound came.

She drew near to him now of her own accord, came and stood just beside him, laying her hand gently on his shoulder. "Cousin Arthur, Cousin Arthur!" she whispered. All her anger was gone; sorrow for him swallowed it up. "You're making a mistake, you know, you are really. You don't love me—not like that. You never did. You never felt——"

He raised his head. "What's the use of talking about what I did do or did feel? I know all that. It's what I do feel that's the question—what I feel now!"

"Oh, but you can't have changed in four or five hours," she pleaded gently, yet with a little smile. "That's absurd. You're mistaken about yourself. It's just that you're angry about Oliver—angry and jealous. And that makes you think you love me. But you never would! To begin with, you're too loyal, too honest, too fond of—Oh, you'd never do it!"

"I had never thought of you as—in that way. But when I saw him, he made me do it. And then—yes, all of a sudden!" He turned his eyes up to her, but imploring mercy rather than favour.

She pressed his shoulder affectionately. "Yes, I suppose it's possible—it might be like that with a man," she said. "I suppose it might. I never thought of it. But only just for a moment, Cousin Arthur! It's not real with you. You'll get over it directly; you'll forget it, and think of me in the old pleasant way you used, as being——" With another little squeeze on his shoulder she laughed low—"Oh, all the wonderful things I know you thought me!" She suddenly recollected how she stood. She drew in her breath sharply, with a sound almost like a sob. "Ah, no, you can never think like that of me again, can you?"

He was silent for a moment, not looking up at her now, but straight in front of him.

"Then—it's true?" he asked.

With a forlorn shake of her head she answered, "Yes, it's true. Since you're like this, I can't keep it up any longer. It's all true. Oliver loves me, and I love him, and all you suspected is—well, is

going to be true about us."

"If you'll only drop that, I swear I'll never breathe a word about—about myself! I will forget! I'll go away till I have forgotten. I'll——"

"Oh, poor boy, I know you would. I should absolutely trust you. But how am I to—drop that?" She smiled ruefully. "It's become just my life." She suddenly lifted her hands above her head and cried in a low but passionate voice, "Oh, I can't bear this! It's terrible. Don't be so miserable, dear Arthur! I can't bear to see you!" She bent down and kissed him on the forehead. "You who've been such a dear dear friend and comrade to me—you who could have made me go on enduring it all here if anybody could! But Oliver came—and look what he's done to both of us!"

"You love him?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes! Or how could all this be happening? You must believe that. I didn't want you to know it—Yes, you were right, I was trying to get you out of the way, I wasn't honest. But since things have turned out like this, you must believe now, indeed you must."

For a full minute he sat silent and motionless. Then he reached up, took her hand, and kissed it three—four—times. "God help me! Well, I'll go to London to-morrow. I can't face him—or Godfrey. I should let it all out in a minute. I can't think how you manage!"

To her too it looked very difficult to manage now. The revelation made to Arthur seemed somehow to extend to the whole household. She felt that everyone would be watching and pointing, even though Arthur himself went away. She had grown fearful of being found out—how quickly Arthur had found her out!—and dreaded her husband's surly questions. More scenes might come—more scenes not to be endured! A sudden resolve formed itself in her mind, born of her fear of more detection, of more scenes, of more falling into disgrace.

"I expect Barber will have gone to bed—it's past eleven," she said. "But you can give him your orders in the morning. And—and I shan't see you. Be happy, dear Cousin Arthur, and, oh, splendidly successful! I'm sure you will! And now go to bed and sleep, poor tired boy!"

"Oh, I can't sleep—not yet. This is good-bye?" His voice choked on the word a little. He turned his chair round, and she gave her hands into his.

"Yes, this must be good-bye—for the present at all events. Perhaps some day, when all this is an old story, if you wish it——"

"Are you going away with him, or——?"

"Oh, going away! I must do that. You do see that, don't you? And Oliver wouldn't have anything else. Try to think kindly and—and pleasantly of me. Remember our good times, dear Arthur, not this—this awful evening!"

"I've been such a fool—and now such a blackguard! Because now if I could, I'd——"

"Hush, hush! Don't say things like that. They're not really true, and they make you feel worse. We're just dear old friends parting for a while, because we must."

"Perhaps I shall never see you again, Bernadette—and you've been pretty nearly everything in my life since we've known one another."

"Dear Arthur, you must let me go now. I can't bear any more of it. Oh, I am so desperately sorry, Arthur!" A tear rolled down her cheek.

"Never mind, Bernadette. It'll be all right about me. And—well, I can't talk about you, but you needn't be afraid of my thinking anything—anything unkind. Good-bye."

She drew her hands away, and he relinquished his hold on them without resistance. There was no more to be said—no more to be done. She stood where she was for a moment; he turned his chair round to the table again, spread out his arms, and laid his face on his hands. Just the same attitude in which she had found him! But she knew that his distress was deeper. Despair and forlornness succeeded to anger and fear; and, on the top of them, the poor boy accused himself of disloyalty to his house, to his cousin, to herself. He saw himself a blackguard as well as a fool.

She could not help speaking to him once again. "God bless you, Cousin Arthur," she said very softly. But he did not move; he gave no sign of hearing her. She turned and went very quietly out of the room, leaving her poor pet in sad plight, her poor toy broken, behind her.

It was more than she had bargained for, more than she could bear! Silently and cautiously, but with swift and resolute steps, she passed along the corridor to the hall, and mounted the stairs. She was bent on shutting out the vision of Arthur from her sight.

CHAPTER XXII

PRESSING BUSINESS

Oliver Wyse had finished his letters and was smoking a last cigar before turning in. Barber had brought him whiskey and soda water, and wished him good-night, adding that, in case Sir Oliver should want anything in the night, he had put Wigram, his chauffeur, who acted as valet also when his master was on a visit, in the small room next the bathroom which Sir Oliver was to use.

"He said he liked to be within hail of you, Sir Oliver."

"Wigram's been with me in a lot of queer places, Barber. He's got into the habit of expecting midnight alarms. In fact he was a sort of bodyguard to begin with; then a valet; now he's mainly a chauffeur—a very handy fellow! Well, thank you, Barber—Good-night."

The cigar was pleasant; so was the whiskey-and-soda; he felt drowsily content. The situation caused no disturbance either in his nerves or in his conscience. He was accustomed to critical positions and rather liked them; to break or to observe rules and conventions was entirely a question of expediency, to be settled as each case arose—and this case was now abundantly settled. The only real danger had lain in Bernadette herself; and she shewed no sign of wavering. He had enjoyed the comedy of her wise counsel to Arthur, though for his own part he cared little whether the boy went or stayed; if need be, it could not be difficult to put him in his place.

A low light knock came on his door. A little surprised, but fancying it must be the devoted Wigram come to have a last look at him, he called, "Come in!" Bernadette darted in and shut the door noiselessly. She held up a finger, enjoining silence, and walked quickly across the room.

He threw his cigar into the grate, and advanced to meet her, smiling. "I say—is this your 'tremendous caution'?" But then he perceived the excitement under which she laboured. "What's the matter? Anything gone wrong?"

"Yes, Arthur! He's found out! And I—somehow I couldn't deny it to him."

He smiled at her kindly and tolerantly, yet with a gentle reproof. Her courage was failing her again, it seemed. It was a good thing that he had come back to Hilsey—to keep her up to the scratch.

"Well? Did he turn nasty? Never mind, I'll quiet him. Where is he?"

"No, no, please don't go near him. He's not nasty; he's all broken up. Oliver, he says he's in love with me himself."

He smiled at that. "Coming on, the young cousin, isn't he? But I'm not much surprised, Bernadette."

"He—he's upset me dreadfully. I didn't mean it to happen like this. It's too much for me. My nerves——"

She spoke all the time in quick agitated whispers. Oliver walked to the door, turned the key, and came back to her. He took one of her hands in his. She looked up at him with tears in her eyes. "He has been such a friend really. He trusted me so."

"Well, I suppose he'll take your advice now—your wise advice—and pack himself off to-morrow morning. Breakfast in bed, and you needn't see him."

"Judith will guess—I know she will. Oliver, I—I can't keep it up, with you here—not even though Arthur goes. I'm afraid of Judith now—even of Godfrey!"

"I'm certainly not going to leave you here, up against it, all by yourself." She was not to be trusted alone now. She had been shewn too vividly the side of the shield which it was his task to hide from her eyes—a task to which he alone was equal. Left to herself, she might go back on the whole thing, very likely!

"Take me away from it all now, won't you?" she asked.

"What now—to-night?" His eyes lit up humorously. "Sharp work, isn't it? Rather difficult to get out of the house to-night without risking—well, encounters! And you wouldn't like that."

"Can't you think of anything? I can't stand these next few days."

He considered a moment, marshalling plans in his quick-moving mind. "Look here, can you be sure of waking up early in the morning?"

"I wish I could be half as sure of going to sleep at all!"

"Well, get up at half-past five—Your servants won't be about then?—pack what you want in a bag, leave it just inside your room, put on your things, and meet me outside the hall-door just before six. We'll go for a walk!"

"But the station? It's nearly three miles off! And there are no trains——"

"Wait, wait! My man will fetch your bag—just a little risk there, not much at that hour—hang my motor-coat over it, so that nobody can see it isn't mine, and take it round to the garage with my traps. I suppose the car'll be locked up, and he'll have to get the key from somebody. He'll say that I'm suddenly called away, that I've walked on ahead, and he's to pick me up at the east lodge. If you're seen, you're just putting me on my way, don't you see? He'll give your fellow at the garage a sovereign, and he won't be too curious!"

"Yes, yes, I see!" she whispered eagerly.

"Starting then, we can be in town in lots of time to catch the afternoon train to Boulogne. I'll wire the yacht to meet us somewhere else, instead of Southampton. Ostend, perhaps—that'd do all right. Now how does that suit you?"

Her eyes sparkled again. "Why, it's splendid!" How difficulties seemed to vanish under his sure decisive touch! It was by this gift, more than any other, that he had won and held her.

"I've managed trickier businesses than this. It's all perfectly easy, and with luck you won't be

exposed to meeting any of them again."

"Thank heaven!" she murmured.

"But you'd better not stay here now. One can never be sure somebody won't come nosing about." He kissed her lightly. "Go, be quick, to your room. I'll go and wake up Wigram now, and tell him what I want; you needn't bother about him—he's absolutely reliable. Come along." He drew her across the room with him, unlocked the door and opened it. "Don't make a noise! Just before six, in the porch, remember!"

She nodded in silence and glided quickly along the passage, which was dimly lighted by a single oil lamp; Godfrey would not hear of installing modern illuminants at Hilsey. He gave her time to get to her room, and then himself went in the other direction along the corridor, and knocked on the door of the little room where the faithful and reliable Wigram slept.

He was soon back—it did not take long to make Wigram understand what was wanted of him—and sat down again at his writing-table. Some of the letters had to be re-written, for he had dated them from Hilsey, and that would not do now. He was smiling in a half-impatient amusement over women and their whims. They were so prone to expect to get all they wanted without paying the necessary price, without the little drawbacks which could not be avoided. After all, a woman couldn't reasonably expect to run away without causing a bit of a rumpus, and some little distress to somebody! It was very seldom in this world that either man or woman could get all they wanted without putting somebody else's nose out of joint; if only that were honestly acknowledged, there would be a great deal less cant talked.

He raised his head from his work and paused, with his cigar half-way to his mouth, to listen a moment to a slow heavy tread which came along the passage from the top of the stairs and stopped at a door on the opposite side, nearer to the stairs. Arthur Lisle coming to bed—he had indicated his own room in passing, when he was playing deputy-host and showing Oliver his quarters. A good thing he hadn't come up a little sooner! He might have met Bernadette coming out of a room which it was by no means the proper thing for her to have been in. Another painful encounter that would have been! Again his tolerant smile came; he was really a good-natured man; he liked Arthur and was sorry for him, even while he was amused. To-night the world was probably seeming quite at an end to that young fellow—that young fool of a fellow. Whereas, in fact, he was just at the beginning of all this sort of business!

"I suppose he wants my blood," he reflected. "That'd make him feel a lot better. But he can't have it. I'm afraid he can't, really!"

Well, Arthur's was one of the sound and primitive reasons for wanting a man's blood; nothing to quarrel with there! Only the thing would not last, of course. Quite soon it would all be a memory, a bit of experience. At least that would be so if the boy were—or managed to grow into, to let life shape him into—a sensible fellow. Many men went on being fools about women to the end. "Well, I suppose some people would say that I'm being a fool now," he added candidly. "Perhaps I am. Well, she's worth it." With a smile he finished off his work, got himself to bed briskly, and was soon asleep.

Sick at last of the dreary and musty room, Arthur had slouched miserably to bed—though he was sure that he could not sleep. He could not think either, at least hardly coherently. The ruin which had swooped down on him was too overwhelming. And so quick! All in a few hours! It seemed too great to understand, almost too great to feel. It was, as it were, a devastation, a clean sweep of all the best things in his life—his adoration for Bernadette, his loyalty to Godfrey, the affection which had gathered in his heart for these his kinsfolk, for this the home of his forefathers. A dull numb pain of the soul afflicted him, such as a man might feel in the body as he comes to consciousness after a stunning blow. The future seemed impossible to face; he did not know how to set about the task of reconstructing it. He was past anger, past resentment; he did not want Oliver Wyse's blood now. Was he not now even as Oliver, save that Oliver was successful? And Oliver owed no loyalty to the man he robbed. In the extravagance of his despair he called himself the meanest of men as well as the most miserable. "My God! my God!" he kept muttering to himself, in his hopeless miserable desolation.

But he was young and very weary, exhausted with his suffering. He had sworn to himself that sleep was impossible, but nature soon had her way with him. Yet he struggled against sleep, for on it must follow a bitter awakening.

When he did awake, it was broad daylight. From his bed, which stood between the two windows of the room, he could see the sunlight playing on the opposite wall to his right; to the left the wall was still in shadow. It seemed that he must have pulled up the blind of one window and not of the other, before he got into bed, though he did not remember doing it. Indeed at the first awakening he recollected nothing very distinctly. The memories of the night before took a minute or two to acquire distinctness, to sort themselves out. Presently he gave a low dull groan and turned on his side again, refusing to face the morning—the future that awaited him inexorably. But another memory came to him in a queer quick flash—Judith's smile when she told him that Godfrey had taken to his bed. With a muttered curse he drew his watch from under the pillow. Half-past seven!

He raised himself on his elbow, his back turned to the light. Everything became clear to memory now; and the end of it all was that he had to go, and go quickly, as soon as he could, by the earliest train possible. He did not want to see anybody; above all he must not see Bernadette; he had promised her that, practically; nor could he himself bear another meeting and another parting. Joe Halliday and Wills and Mayne won the day—by the help of an alliance most unlooked-

for!

A voice spoke from the window to his right—where the blind was pulled up and the fresh morning air blew in through the opened sash. "So you're awake at last, Arthur!"

He rolled over on to his other elbow in surprise, blinking at the strong light. Judith was sitting on the broad low seat beneath the window. She wore a walking dress and out-of-door boots, but her hair was only carelessly caught together; she wore no hat. She smiled at him, but her eyes looked red and she held her handkerchief tightly squeezed in one hand.

"Why, what are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Well, I've been crying—not that that's any use. I've been here nearly half-an-hour. I meant to wake you, but you looked so awfully tired. Besides, it was too late."

"Too late for what?"

"He's taken her away, Arthur."

He did not move; propped up on his elbow, he looked at her with a morose steadfastness.

"I'm generally out before breakfast, you know, with Patsy. I didn't sleep well last night, and I was earlier than usual. I was out by half-past six, and went for a walk in the meadows. Coming back, I passed the garage; Stokes was cleaning the car and I stopped to speak to him about the new puppy—he's not very well. I noticed Sir Oliver's car wasn't there, and he told me that Sir Oliver's man had knocked him up and made him unlock the garage an hour before. The man brought Sir Oliver's luggage from the house, Stokes said, and told him that Sir Oliver had walked on ahead, and he was to pick him up. Stokes asked where they were going, and the man said home, he supposed, but Sir Oliver hadn't told him. The man was rather short with him, Stokes said, and seemed in a hurry. I thought it all sounded rather funny, especially Sir Oliver walking on ahead—at six in the morning!—but I said nothing to Stokes, though I think he thought it a bit queer too. So when I got back I went to Bernadette's room. I didn't exactly suspect that she'd gone too, but I had a sort of uneasy—well, I wanted to be quite sure, don't you know? I opened the door quietly—a little way—and I saw that the room was quite light. That told me directly; she can't bear a chink of light in her room. So I went in. She wasn't there; she hadn't been to bed, she'd only lain down on the outside. Most of the things on her dressing-table were gone, and I couldn't see the dressing-bag that always stood by her big hanging-cupboard. I thought I'd better come and tell you. On the way I met Barber, just up, I suppose, in his apron and shirt-sleeves. He told me that Sir Oliver had gone and Wigram—his man, you know—too."

"But Stokes didn't see either of them?"

"No. They must have walked on together, and got into the car when it came up. Only just then I remembered that I'd found the front door unlocked and had meant to scold Barber for being so careless. It had gone out of my head till then." She paused a moment. "Did you see her last night? She wanted to see you—asked where you'd gone, you know."

"Yes; she came to me in the smoking-room."

"Did she say anything that sounded like—like——?"

He waited a while before he answered the unfinished question. "She said nothing about this morning."

"But did she say——?"

Arthur nodded his head.

"Oh then, it's quite clear!" said Judith.

"I didn't think she meant to go this morning. I was to go. We said good-bye."

"She has gone, though. I'm sure of it. Well, I've thought she would for some time past, so I don't quite see why I've been crying. How could we help it? Could we give her what she wanted? Could Godfrey? Could I? Could you? Margaret was the only chance, but poor little Margaret's—well, Margaret! She wasn't enough to keep her." She rose from her seat. "Well, I'll go, because you must get up."

Arthur paid no heed. "I think it's because of me that she's gone this morning," he said slowly.

"Why? Did you quarrel? Did you talk about—about Sir Oliver?"

"Yes, at first. Then I told her I was in love with her."

She raised her hands and let them fall in a gesture of despairing irritation. "In love, in love! Oh, I've had enough of it for the present! Get up, Arthur!"

"Yes, I'll get up—get up and clear out," he said in sullen bitterness. "I'll go back to work; that's the best thing I can do. I meant to go this morning, anyhow."

She had moved towards the door, but she stopped now, facing him, between bed and door. "You mean that you're going away—now—this morning?" He nodded his head. She waited a moment and then smiled. "Oh, well, I think I'll come too. After all, it won't be very lively here, will it?"

He started in surprise. "You go? You couldn't think of that, Judith? Why, what's little Margaret to do? And Godfrey? Oh, you can't go!"

"Why can't I? I'm a Lisle, aren't I? I'm a Lisle, just as much as you and Godfrey! Why aren't I to behave as a Lisle then—go to bed or run away when things get difficult and uncomfortable? I

rather wish I had a real man to run away with—like Bernadette!"

"God help him if you had!" growled Arthur, to whom the insinuation was not grateful.

"That's better! You have got a bit of a fight somewhere in you," she mocked. "And anyhow—get up!"

"Well, I'm going to—if you'll clear out, and be——"

"And be damned to me? Yes, I know! You can say that as often as you like, but you've got to help me to face this business. You've got to be the Man of the Family!" She smiled rather scornfully. "It's the least you can do, if you really did try to make love to Bernadette."

He flushed a little, but answered calmly: "As I don't suppose you'll be able to think of anything to say more disagreeable than that, you may as well go, and let me dress."

"Yes, I will." She turned to the door, smiling in a grim triumph. Just as she went out, she looked over her shoulder and added, "You'll have to tell Godfrey."

That gave him a chance. He cried after her, "You're in a funk too, really!"

She smiled at him. "Didn't I say I was a Lisle—or half a one—like you, Arthur?" She pulled the door to, with a bang, and he heard her quick decisive steps retreating along the corridor.

The next moment Barber entered the room, bringing hot water. He had seen Judith as she came out. Only another of the queer things happening this morning! He wore an air of tremendously discreet gravity. But Arthur guessed from his face that wonder and surmise, speculation and gossip, were afloat in the house already.

He dressed quickly and went down to breakfast. Judith was there alone; Margaret was having breakfast upstairs with the nurse, she told him—out of the way of chattering tongues, her look added—as she poured out coffee.

Barber came in with a telegram, and laid it by her. "The boy's waiting, miss."

She read it. "No answer, Barber."

"Oh, I want to send a wire. Bring me a form, will you?" said Arthur.

When he had written his message, Judith rose and came round to him, carrying his coffee in one hand and the telegram in the other; she gave him the latter to read—"Don't expect me back. Shall write you." There was no signature.

"What does she want to write about?"

"Oh, her things, I suppose. What did you say in your wire?"

"I said 'Awfully sorry can't come. Pressing family business.'"

"It is—very. I'm afraid I was rather disagreeable, Arthur."

He looked up at her with a rueful smile as he stirred his coffee. "You're like a cold bath on a freezing morning—stinging but hygienic."

There was a sudden choke in her voice as she answered: "I'd have said and done anything rather than let you go. And if I've ruined your play and your prospects, I can't help it." She walked quickly away to the window and stood there a moment with her back towards him. Then she returned to her place and ate a business-like breakfast.

CHAPTER XXIII

FACING THE SITUATION

The gods were laughing at him; so it seemed to Arthur Lisle. They chose to chastise his folly and his sin by ridicule. He whom the catastrophe—the intrigue and the flight—had broken was chosen to break the news of it. He must put on a composed consolatory face, preach fortitude, recommend patience under the inevitable. He was plumped back into his old position of useful cousin, the friend of both husband and wife. Judith was that too. Why should not she carry the tidings? "No, you'll be more sympathetic," she insisted, with the old touch of mockery governing her manner again. "I should tell him too much of the truth most likely." So he must do it. But this useful cousin seemed a very different sort of man from the stricken sufferer, the jealous lover, of overnight. Indeed it was pitiable for the forsaken jealous lover—denied even a departure from the scene of his woes, condemned to dwell in the house so full of her and yet so empty, the butt (so his sensitive fancy imagined) of half the gossip and half the giggles of which to his ears Hilsey Manor was already full. But the forsaken lover must sink himself in the sympathetic kinsman—if he could; must wear his face and speak in his tones. A monstrous hypocrisy! "Bernadette's run away, but, I'm sorry to say, not with me, Godfrey." No, no, that was all wrong—that was the truth. "Bernadette's left you for Oliver Wyse—unprincipled woman and artful villain!" Was that right? Well, 'artful villain' was right enough, surely? Perhaps 'deluded woman' would do for Bernadette. "Brave woman and happy man!" the rude laughter of the gods suggested. "If we'd either of us had half his grit, Godfrey!" All sorts of things impossible to say the gods invented in their high but disconcerting irony.

"Well, I'm in for it—here goes!" thought Arthur, as he requested Barber to find out from Mrs. Gates—who had been acting as nurse to her master as well as to his little girl—when Mr. Lisle could see him.

Gossip and giggles there may have been somewhere, probably there were, but not on the faces or in the demeanour of Barber and Mrs. Gates. Pomp, funereal pomp! They seemed sure that Bernadette was dead, and that her death was a suicide.

"I will ascertain immediately, sir," said Barber. He was really very human over it all—a mixture of shockedness and curiosity, condemnation and comprehension, outrage and excuse—for she certainly had a way with her, Mrs. Lisle had. But his sense of appropriateness overpowered them all—a result, no doubt, of the ceremonial nature of his vocation.

Mrs. Gates's humanity was more on the ample surface of her ample personality. She made no pretence of not understanding what had happened, and even went a little further than that.

"Lor, sir, well there!" she whispered to Arthur. "I've 'ad my fears. Yes, he can see you, poor gentleman! I've not said a word to 'im. And poor Miss Margaret!" She was bent on getting every ounce out of the situation. Arthur did not want to kill her—she was a good woman—but it would have relieved his feelings to jab a penknife into one of the wide margins around her vital parts. "Why is she so fat?" he groaned inwardly and with no superficial relevance. But his instinct was true; her corpulence did, in the most correct sense, aggravate the present qualities of her emotions and demeanour.

And so, in varying forms, the thing was running all through the house—and soon would run all through the village. Mrs. Lisle—Mrs. Lisle of Hilsey! Portentous, horrible—and most exciting! It would run to London soon. Mrs. Lisle of Hilsey was not such a personage there—but still pretty well known. A good many people had been at that party where the Potentates had met. One of them had abdicated now and gone—well, perhaps only as far as Elba!

All the air was full of her, all the voices speaking her name in unison. The sympathetic cousin had great difficulty in getting on the top of the defeated lover when Arthur entered Godfrey's room. And even anyhow—if one left out all the irony and all the complication—the errand was not an easy or a grateful one. If Godfrey had gone to bed sooner than witness a flirtation, what mightn't he do in face of an elopement?

The invalid was sitting up in bed, supported by several pillows, smoking a cigarette and reading yesterday's "Times." The improvement in his temper, manifest from the moment when he took to his bed, seemed to have been progressive. He made Arthur welcome.

"And I hope you've not come to say good-bye?" he added. Arthur had mentioned to him too the call to London and to work.

"No, I'm going to stay on a few days more, if you can put me up. I say, Godfrey——"

"Delighted to keep you—especially when I'm on my back. I hope to be up soon, though, very soon. Er—Wyse is staying on too, I suppose?"

"He left this morning, early, by motor."

"Did he? Really?" He smothered his relief, but it was unmistakable. "Rather sudden, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was sudden. The fact is——"

"Why did he go? Is he coming back?"

"I don't know—well, I mean, he didn't say anything to me. No, he won't be back."

"Oh, I suppose he told Bernadette about it. I thought I heard somebody moving about the house. I'm a light sleeper, you know, especially when I'm ill. About six o'clock, I think it was. I—I suppose Bernadette's disappointed at his not staying longer?" The assumed indifference of his question was contradicted by the eagerness of his furtive glance. Arthur felt it on him; he flushed as he sat down by the bedside, seeking so hard for a form of words, for an opening—something enlightening without being brutal. Godfrey's eyes, sharpened by his ill-will and suspicion, marked the flush and the hesitation; he guessed there was something to tell. "Well?" he added, peevish at getting no immediate answer.

"She—she's gone away too this morning, Godfrey—early—before we were up."

A lean hand shot out from the bed and grasped his wrist. "Arthur?"

"Yes, old chap, I'm sorry to say—it's a bad business."

"You do mean——? Arthur, you do mean——?"

"Yes, she's gone with him." He could not look at Godfrey; his speech was no more than a mutter. He felt the grasp on his wrist tighten, till it hurt him.

"The damned villain! I knew it! The infernal villain, Arthur!" Godfrey cried querulously.

Clearly an assent was required. Arthur's was inadequate. "Awfully bad business! Try to—to be calm, old fellow, while I tell you about it."

"Yes, yes, tell me!"

There was really nothing material left to tell, but Godfrey was greedy for details; such as there were to tell or conjecture he extracted by rapid questioning, even to the telegram which had come for Judith. Not till the end did he relax his hold on Arthur's wrist and lean back again on his pillows.

He lay silent like that for a long time, with Arthur silent beside him. His rage against Oliver seemed spent almost in the moment of its outburst; to his companion's relief he said nothing about Bernadette's conduct. He lay pathetically quiet, looking tired now, rather than angry or distressed. At last he gave a long sigh. "Well, we know where we are now!" he said.

That piece of knowledge had come to more than one inmate of the house in the last twelve hours.

"We must face the situation, Arthur. It's come to a crisis! I think I'm equal to getting up and—and facing the situation."

"Well, you know, there's no particular use in your——"

"My feelings are—well, you can imagine them." ("More or less!" threw in the gods, grimly chuckling.) "But I mustn't think of myself only. There's Margaret and—and all of it. Yes, I shall get up. I shall get up and sit in my chair, Arthur." He was silent again for a minute. "It makes a great difference. I—I shall have to consider my course—what's best in the interests of all of us. A terrible blow! It must be a blow even to you, Arthur? You and she were such good friends, weren't you? And she does this—she lets herself be seduced into doing this!"

"Yes, of course, it's—it's a blow; but it's you and Margaret we've got to think about."

"No, I don't forget you, I don't forget you!" ("If only he would!" groaned Arthur.) "Well, I must consider my course. Where did you say the telegram was sent from?"

"Winchester."

"I expect they stopped to breakfast there."

"Very likely." Arthur rose to his feet; he did not enjoy a "reconstruction" of the flight. The afflicted husband made no protest against his movement.

"Yes, leave me alone for a little while. I have to think—I must review the position. Tell Judith I should like to see her in about an hour's time, and—and go into matters."

Happy to escape, Arthur left him facing the situation, reviewing the position, considering his course, and determining to get up—to get, at any rate, into his arm-chair—the better to perform these important operations. The messenger of catastrophe came away with a strange impression of the effect of his tidings. After the first outburst—itself rather peevish than passionate—came that idle, almost morbid curiosity about details from which he himself instinctively averted his eyes; then this ineffectual fussiness, this vain self-assertion, which turned to facing the situation only when there was no longer anything or anybody to face, and to reviewing the position only when it was past mending. Of smitten love, even of pride wounded to the heart, there seemed little sign. All Arthur's feelings fought against the sacrilegious idea, but it would not be denied an entry into his mind—after the querulous anger, after the curiosity, mingling with the futile fussiness, there had been an undercurrent of relief—relief that nothing and nobody had to be faced really, that really nothing could be done, nothing expected from him, no call made now on courage or on energy—no, nor on a love or a sympathy already dead before Oliver Wyse struck them the final blow.

That morning's flight, then, was not the tragedy, but the end of it, not the culminating scene of terror and pity, but the fall of the curtain on a play played-out. Whatever of good or evil in life it might bring for Bernadette, for Godfrey it brought relief in its train. It was grievous, no doubt, in its external incidents—a society scandal, a family shame—but in itself, in its true significance to his mind, as it really and closely touched his heart, it came as an end—an end to the strain which he could not support, to the challenge which he dared not face, on which he had turned his back in sulks and malingering—an end to his long fruitless effort to be a satisfactory husband.

When Judith came down from her interview and joined Arthur in the garden before lunch, she had another aspect of the case to exhibit, a sidelight to throw on the deserted man's mind and its workings.

"How did you find him?" Arthur asked her.

"Oh, quite calm—and immersed in his account-books." She smiled. "Yes, he's up, in his chair, and a pile of them on the table at his elbow! He says that the first thing to do is to reduce his expenditure. He hopes now to be able to pay off his mortgage in four or five years. She was awfully extravagant, you know, and he hated mortgaging Hilsey."

"Do you think she knew he'd had to do it?"

"No, she didn't. He wouldn't let her know. He liked her to think him richer than he was, I think."

"Then he has no right to grumble at her extravagance."

"I never heard him do that—and he didn't do it this morning. All the same it worried him, and now he can save, oh, enormously, of course! The barouche and the pair of horses are to go, the first thing."

The barouche! It carried his mind back to the beginning, when its costly luxury framed for his eyes their earliest picture of Bernadette's dainty beauty.

"If he isn't going to keep it, he might send it after her. I would."

"Yes, you'd do a lot of foolish things if you were let. Luckily you're not!"

"Judith, I half believe he's glad!"

"Need we admit quite so much as that? Let's say he's facing the situation manfully!"

"Oh, he talked like that to you too, did he?" He jumped up, and took a few paces about the lawn, then came back and stood beside her. "By God, if he's glad, she was right to go, Judith!"

"I've never said anything to the contrary, have I? Have you seen Margaret this morning?"

"No, I haven't. What made you ask me that just now?"

"She came into my head. After all, she's a—a factor in the situation which, as Godfrey observes, has to be faced. I suppose I shall have to adopt her—more or less. Premature cares! Not so much Rome and Florence! It's as well to realise where one comes in oneself. When Godfrey talks of facing the situation, I don't think he proposes to do it alone, you know. You and I come into it."

"Yes." He added after a pause: "Well, we can't turn our backs on him, can we?"

"I've told her that her mother's gone on a visit—suddenly, to see a friend who's ill—and didn't like to wake her up to say good-bye. But that's a temporary solution, of course. She'll have to know more, and something'll have to be arranged about her and Bernadette. I don't suppose he'll object to Bernadette seeing her sometimes." She ended with a smile: "Perhaps you'll be asked to take her and be present at the interviews—and see that Sir Oliver's off the premises."

"I'll be hanged if I do anything of the sort! And, as you asked me to stay here, I don't think you need go on laughing at me."

Judith was impenitent. "It's a thing quite likely to happen," she insisted. "Bernadette would like it."

He turned away angrily and resumed his pacing. Yet in his heart he assented to the tenor of her argument. She might, in her malice, take an extravagant case—a case which, at all events, seemed to him just now cruelly extravagant—but she was right in her main contention. No more than she herself could he turn his back on Godfrey, or cut himself adrift from Hilsey. In last night's desperate hour Bernadette and he, between them, seemed to have cut all the bonds and severed all the ties; his only impulse had been to get away quickly. But it could not be so. Life was not like that—at least not to men who owned the sway of obligations and felt the appeal of loyalty and affection. He could not desert the ship.

Barber came out of the house and brought him a note. "From Mr. Beard, sir. Will you kindly send a verbal answer?"

He read it, and glanced towards Judith. He was minded to consult her. But, no, he would not consult Judith. He would decide for himself; something in the present position made him put a value on deciding for himself, even though he decided wrongly. "All right, say I will, Barber." He lit a cigarette and, walking back to Judith, sat down again beside her. But he said nothing; he waited for her to ask, if she were curious.

She was. "What did Barber want?"

"Only a note from Beard—about the match. We shall be one man short anyhow, and two if I don't turn up. So I told Barber to say I would."

"Good. Margaret and I will come and watch you. We've not gone into official mourning yet, I imagine."

"Hang 'em, they may think what they like! I'm going to play cricket."

So he played cricket, though that again would not have seemed possible over-night, and, notwithstanding that his eye might well have been out, he made five-and-twenty runs and brought off a catch of a most comforting order. Hilsey won the match by four wickets, and Judith, Margaret, and he strolled back home together in the cool of the evening, while the setting sun gilded the mellow and peaceful beauties of the old house.

The little girl held Judith's hand, and, excited by the incidents of the game, above all by Cousin Arthur's dashing innings—his style was rather vigorous than classic—prattled more freely than her wont.

"I wish mummy hadn't had to go away just to-day," she said. "Then she could have seen Cousin Arthur's innings. I wanted to cry when he was caught out."

Arthur applied the words in parable, smiling grimly at himself in his pain. He had been crying himself at being caught out, and at mummy's having had to go away that morning. But he mustn't do it. He must set his teeth, however sore the pain, however galling the consciousness of folly. Surely, in face of what had happened to that house, nobody but an idiot—nobody but a man unable to learn even words of one syllable in the book of life—could be content to meet trouble with sighs and sulks, or with cries only and amorous lamentation? Not to feel to the depths of his being the shattering blow, or lightly and soon to forget it—that could not be, nor did his instinct ask it; it would argue shallowness indeed, and a cheapening of all that was good and generous in him, a cheapening too of her who, towards him at least, had ever been generous and good. What had he, of all men, against her? Had she not given him all she could—joy, comradeship, confidence in all things save that one? In the crisis of her own fate, when she was risking all her fortunes on that momentous throw, had she not paused, had she not turned aside, to pity him and to be very tender towards his foolishness? Was his the hand to cast at her the stone of an ungrateful or accusing memory?

They passed through the tall iron gates which, with a true squirearchical air, guarded the precincts of Hilsey Manor.

"Why, look, there's papa in the garden, walking on the lawn!" cried Margaret.

Yes, there was Godfrey, heavily wrapped in shawls, walking to and fro briskly. He had got up and come downstairs—to face the situation.

CHAPTER XXIV

DID YOU SAY MRS.?

The end of another fortnight found Arthur still at Hilsey, but on the eve of leaving it for a time at least. Another summons had reached him, one which he could not disregard. His mother wrote, affectionately reproaching him for delaying his visit to Malvern. "You promised us to come before this. Besides I'm not very well, and you'll cheer me up. You mustn't altogether forsake us for the other branch of the family!"

Arthur recognised his duty, but with a reluctance of which he was ashamed. Common disaster had drawn the party at Hilsey more closely together. Judith and Arthur, working hand in hand to "make things go," had become firm friends, though they were apt to spar and wrangle still. The little girl—she knew by now that her mother's visit was to be a long one—responded to the compassionate tenderness evoked by a misfortune which she herself did not yet understand; she gained confidence from marks of love and, as she claimed affection more boldly, elicited it in ampler measure.

Freed from a struggle to which he was morbidly conscious of being unequal, Godfrey Lisle showed his better side. Aggressive courage was what he lacked and knew that he lacked; he was not without fortitude to endure the pain of a blow that had fallen—especially when he could be sure it was the last! He was at peace now; the worst possible had happened—and, lo, it was not unendurable! There were compensations; he was not humiliated any more, and the sad leak in his finances—it had threatened even his tenure of Hilsey itself—could be stopped. Though he was still fussy, self-important over trifles, sometimes ridiculous, and very dependent on his stronger kinsfolk, he was more amiable, less secretive of his feelings, free from sulks and grievances. The gentleman in him came out, both in his bearing towards those about him and in the attitude he adopted towards Bernadette herself. He spoke of her as seldom as he could but without rancour, and in regard to future arrangements put himself at her disposal. When letters came from Oliver Wyse's lawyers, acting on instructions received from the voyagers on summer seas, he caused Arthur to reply for him that he would give her the freedom she desired, and would endeavour to meet whatever might be her wishes in regard to Margaret. He was scrupulous—and even meticulous—over setting aside all her personal belongings to await her orders. He declared himself ready to consider any pecuniary arrangement which might be thought proper; some relics of his old pride in lavishly supplying all her requirements seemed to survive in his mind, side by side with his relief at the thought of paying off his mortgage.

To Arthur the quiet after the storm brought a more sober view of himself and of his life, of what he had done and what had happened to him. His eyes saw more clearly for what they were both the high-flying adoration and the tempestuous gust of passion which jealousy had raised. A critical and healthy distrust of himself and his impulses began gradually to displace the bitter and morbid self-contempt of the first hours and days after the disaster. He must still grieve with the forsaken worshipper of the smoking-room; he could not yet forget the pangs of the baffled lover; but a new man was coming to birth in him—one who, if he still grieved and sighed, could come near to smiling too at these extravagant gentlemen with their idolising dreams and gusty passions. Rueful and bitter the smile might be, but it was tonic. It helped to set devotion, passion, and catastrophe in their true places and to assign to them their real proportions. In it was the dawn of a recognition that he was still no more than on the threshold of a man's experience.

Neither was it a bad thing perhaps that another and very practical trouble began to press him hard. Though he was living in free quarters now, the bills contracted during his great London season began to come tumbling in, many for the second or third time. "To account rendered" was a legend with which he was becoming familiar to the point of disgust. The five hundred pounds was running very low; the diminished dividends could not meet his deficit. When Godfrey talked finance to him, as he often did, he was inclined to retort that there were finances in a more desperate condition than those of the estate of Hilsey and possessing no such new-born prospects of recovery—prospects born in sore travail, it is true, but there all the same for Godfrey's consolation.

But there was the farce! That persevering project emerged on the horizon again. It was in full rehearsal now; it was due in three weeks' time: it had got a third act at last, Mr. Claud Beverley and Mr. Langley Etheringham having apparently assuaged their differences. It had even got a name—a name, as Joe Halliday wrote in his enthusiasm, as superior to the name of *Help Me Out Quickly* as the play itself was to that bygone masterpiece. Arthur told Judith the name and, in spite of that resolution of his about relying on his own judgment, awaited her opinion anxiously. After all, in this case it was not his judgment, but, presumably, Mr. Claud Beverley's.

"'*Did You Say Mrs.?*' That's what you're going to call it, is it?"

"It's what they're going to call it. It's not my invention, you know."

"Well, I should think it must be vulgar enough, anyhow," said Judith.

"Oh, vulgar be hanged! That doesn't matter. Jolly good, I call it! Sort of piques your curiosity. Why did He say Mrs.?—That's what the public'll want to know, don't you see?"

"Or why did She say Mrs. perhaps!"

"There you are! Another puzzle! You see, you're curious yourself directly, Judith."

"Well, yes, I am rather," Judith confessed, laughing.

"I think He said it about Her—when she wasn't," Arthur maintained.

"I think She said it about herself," urged Judith. "Oh, of course, she wasn't—there can't be any doubt about that."

So Judith thought well of the title—evidently she did. Arthur's approval was fortified and grew with contemplation.

"It's corking!" he declared. "And if only Ayesha Layard's half as good as Joe thinks——"

"If only who's half as good as——?"

"Ayesha Layard—that's our star, our leading lady. A discovery of Joe's; he's wild about her."

"I wonder who invented her name, if you come to that!"

"Well, we'll hope for the best," said Arthur, laughing. "I shall be up a tree, if it goes wrong."

"Not a bad thing to be up a tree sometimes; you get a good view all round."

"Sagacious philosopher! But I can't afford to lose my money."

"Let's see, how much were you silly enough——?"

"One—thousand—pounds. No less! I can't really quite make out how I came to do it."

"I'm sure I can't help you there, Arthur. I wasn't in your confidence."

"Never mind! In for it now! I shall get hold of Joe for lunch on my way through town, and hear all about it."

"You might look in at the Temple too, and see how many briefs you've missed!"

"Well, it's vacation, you know—Still I mean to settle down to that when I get back from Malvern."

"Yes, you must. We mustn't keep you any longer. You've been very good to stay—and it's been very good to have you here, Arthur."

"By Jove, when I think of what I expected my visit here to be, and what it has been!"

She shook her head at him with a smile. "Then don't think of it," she counselled. "Think of *Did You Say Mrs.?* instead!"

The parting from Hilsey could not be achieved without some retrospects, some drawing of contrasts, without memories bitter or seductive; that would have demanded a mind too stoical. Yet his leave-taking was graced and softened by their reluctance to let him go. He went not as a guest whose sojourn under a strange roof is finished and who may chance not to pass that way again; his going was rather as that of a son of the house who sallies forth on his business or his ventures and, God willing, shall come again, bringing his sheaves with him, to a home ever and gladly open. So they all, in their ways, tried to tell him or to show him. For their sakes, no less than for the dear sake of her who was gone, his heart was full.

Joe Halliday bustled in to lunch at the appointed meeting-place as busy and sanguine as ever—so busy indeed that he appeared not to have been able to see much of *Did You Say Mrs.?* lately. "But it's going on all right," he added reassuringly. "We had a job over that third act, but it's topping now. Claud had an idea that Langley liked at last, thank heaven! It's a job to keep those two chaps from cutting one another's throats—that's the only trouble. I expect they'll be rehearsing this afternoon. Would you like to drop in for a bit?"

"Love it! I've never seen a rehearsal, and this'll be thrilling! My train isn't till 4.45."

"Ayesha's divine! Look here, you mustn't make love to her. I'm doing that myself. I mean I'm trying. That's as far as I've got." He laughed good-humouredly, devouring rump-steak at a ruinous rate.

"How's everybody, Joe? How are the Sarradets?"

"I saw the old man only yesterday. He's in great form—so cockahoop about this company of his that I believe he's taken on a new lease of life."

"What company? I haven't heard about it."

"Haven't you? Why, he's turned his business into a company—mainly to stop our young friend Raymond from playing ducks and drakes with it, when his turn comes. It's a private company—no public issue of shares. A few debentures for his friends—I've been looking after that side of it for him a bit. Like some?"

"Thanks, but just at present I'm not supporting the investment market," smiled Arthur.

"Will be soon! So will all of us. Yes, it's all fixed—and that lucky devil Sidney Barslow steps in as Managing Director. He's done himself pretty well all round, has Sidney!"

"He seems to have. Is he all right?" Arthur's comment and question were both so devoid of interest that Joe stared at him in amazement.

"I say, don't you know? Didn't anybody write and tell you? Didn't she write? Marie, I mean. She's engaged to Sidney. Do you mean to say you didn't know that?"

"No, nobody told me. I've been away, you see." He paused a moment. "Rather sudden, wasn't it?"

"Well, when a stone once begins to roll down hill—!" said Joe, with a knowing grin. "Besides he'd been very useful to them over Raymond. The old man took no end of a fancy to him. I imagine it all somehow worked in together. Funny she didn't write and tell you about it!"

Arthur felt that his companion was regarding him with some curiosity; the friendship between Marie Sarradet and himself had been so well known in the circle; whether it would become anything more had doubtless been a matter of speculation among them. He did not mind Joe's curiosity; better that it should be turned on this matter than on his more recent experiences.

"I suppose she had something considerably more pressing to think about," he remarked with a smile.

Yet the news caused not indeed resentment or jealousy, but a vague annoyance, based partly on vanity—the engagement was sudden, the deeper memories of another attachment must have faded quickly—but mainly on regret for Marie. He could not help feeling that she was throwing herself away on a partner beneath her, unworthy of her—from family reasons in some measure probably, or just for want of anybody better. The Marie he had known—that side of her which her shrewd and affectionate diplomacy had always contrived to present to the eyes whose scrutiny she feared—the Marie whom once he had marked for his—surely she could not easily mate with Sidney Barslow, for all the good there was in him? He forgot that there might be another Marie whom he did not know so well, perhaps in the end a more real, a more natural, a preponderating one. He should not have forgotten that possibility, since there had proved to be more than one Bernadette!

"Well, I hope they'll be very happy. I must go and see her when I'm back in town."

"They'll do all right," Joe pronounced. "Sidney has taken a reef in—several, in fact. He'll have a big chance at old Sarradet's place and, if I know him, he'll use it."

"And how's Raymond going on?"

"Raymond's on appro., so to speak, both as to the business and in another quarter, I think. Our pretty Amabel is waiting to see how he sticks to the blue ribbon of a blameless life. The old set's rather gone to pot, hasn't it, Arthur? The way of the world, what?"

"By Jove, it is!" sighed Arthur. Things had a way of going to pot—with a vengeance.

The two philosophers finished their pints of beer, and set out for the Burlington Theatre; upon entering which they shed their philosophic character and became excited adventurers.

Mr. Langley Etheringham was taking the company through the first act; they were in the middle of it when Joe, having piloted Arthur through dark and dirty ways, deposited him in the third row of the stalls. The well-known "producer" was a shortish man with a bald head, a red moustache, and fiery eyes. He was an embodiment of perpetual motion. He kept on moving his arms from the level of his thighs to that of his head, as though he were lifting a heavy weight in his hands, and accompanied the action by a constant quick murmur of "Pick it up, pick it up, pick it up!" He broke off once or twice to observe sadly, "Not a funeral, my boy, not a funeral!" but he was soon back at his weight-lifting again.

"Langley's a great believer in pace, especially in the first act," Joe whispered. Arthur nodded sagaciously. Mr. Etheringham fascinated him; he could have watched him contentedly for a long while, as one can watch the untiring and incredibly swift action of some machine. But nobody on the stage seemed to take much notice. Some were reading their parts all the time, some were trying to do without their written parts. The leading man—a tall, stout, grey-haired man in double eyeglasses—just mumbled his words indifferently, but was terribly anxious about his "crosses." "Where's my cross?" "Is this my cross?" "I crossed here this morning." "I don't like this cross, Langley." His life seemed compact of crosses.

Arthur could not gather much of what the first act was about; he had missed the "exposition"—so at least Joe informed him; the confusion was to an inexperienced eye considerable, the dialogue hard to hear owing to Mr. Etheringham's exhortations and the leading man's crosses. But he did not mind much; he was keenly interested in the scene and the people. It did, however, appear that the four characters now taking part in the action were expecting a fifth, a woman, and that her entrance was to be the turning-point of the act. Mr. Etheringham varied his appeal. "Keep it up, keep it up, keep it up!" he implored. "Keep it up for her, Willie, keep it *Up*!" He waved his hands furiously, then brought them suddenly to rest, stretched out on each side of him. "*Now!*"

Everybody was still; even the leading man did not want to cross.

Miss Ayesha Layard entered. It was evidently a great moment. The others stiffened in the rigidity of surprise. Miss Layard looked round, smiling. The leading man began to mumble. Mr. Etheringham peremptorily stopped him. "Hold it, Willie, hold it—I told you to hold it, man! It'll stand another five seconds!" With poised hands he held them planted and speechless. "Now!"

Joe heaved a sigh. "Pretty good, don't you think so?"

"Splendid!" said Arthur. "I suppose she's really somebody else, or—or they think she is?"

"Ought to be, anyhow," Joe whispered back with a cunning smile.

Miss Ayesha Layard was a small lady, very richly dressed. She had a turned-up nose, wide-open

blue eyes, and an expression of intense innocence. She did not look more than seventeen, and no doubt could look even younger when required. In one hand she held the script of her part, in the other a large sandwich with a bite out of it; and she was munching.

"No, no!" cried Mr. Etheringham, suddenly spying the sandwich, "I will not go on while you're eating!"

"But I'm so hungry, Mr. Etheringham!" she pleaded in a sweet childish voice. "It's past three and I've had no lunch."

"Lunch, lunch, always lunch! No sooner do we begin to get going than it's lunch!"

She stood still, munching, smiling, appealing to him with wide-open candid eyes. He flung himself crossly into a chair. "Take a quarter-of-an-hour then! After that we'll go back and run straight through the act." Miss Layard dimpled in a smile. He broke out again. "But go on while you're eating I won't!"

On receiving their brief respite the men on the stage had scuttled off, like rabbits into their holes; Miss Layard too hurried off, but soon reappeared in the front of the house, carrying a paper bag with more sandwiches. She sat down in the front row of the stalls, still munching steadily.

"I'll be back in a minute," said Joe, and went and sat himself down beside her.

A melancholy voice came from the cavernous recesses of the pit: "We could do with a bit more life, Etheringham."

"If we get the pace and the positions now, the life'll soon come. I've got some experience, I suppose, haven't I?"

The author emerged into view, as he replied sadly, "Oh, experience, yes!" He did not appear disposed to allow the producer any other qualifications for his task.

Mr. Etheringham gave him a fiery glare but no answer. Mr. Beverley saw Arthur and came up to him. "Hullo, Lisle, have you come to see this rot?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid I can't stay. I've a train to catch, and I've got to get my hair cut first."

"Oh, well, you won't miss much," said Beverley resignedly, as he dropped into the next stall.

Arthur was surprised at his mode of referring to the great work; his attitude had been different that night at the Sarradets', when they celebrated the formation of the Syndicate. Perhaps the author detected his feeling, for he went on:

"Oh, it's all right of its sort. It's funny, you know, all right—it'll go. Etheringham there swears by it, and he's a pretty good judge, in spite of his crankiness. But—well, I've moved on since I wrote it. Life has begun to interest me—real life, I mean, and real people, and the way things really happen. I'm writing a play now about a woman leaving her husband and children. I hope the Twentieth Society'll do it. Well, I treat it like a thing that really happens, not as you see it done on the stage or in novels."

Arthur was curious. "How do you make her do it?" he asked.

"Why, in a reasonable way—openly, after discussing the matter, as real men and women would. None of the old elopement nonsense! Real people don't do that."

"Well, but—er—don't people differ?"

"Not half so much as you think—not real people. Well, you'll see. Only I wish I could get on a bit quicker. The office takes up so much of my time. If I can make a bit out of this thing, I'll chuck the office." He paused for a minute. "You've been away, haven't you?"

"Yes, I've been down in the country. Had some family affairs to—er—look after." He was a little surprised that Mr. Beverley had condescended to notice his absence.

"Going to be in town now?"

"Well, I'm off for about ten days more. Then I've got to buckle to work—if I can get any work to buckle to, that is."

Mr. Beverley nodded thoughtfully and smiled. The next moment a loud giggling proceeded from where Miss Layard and Joe sat. The lady rose, saying, "I'll ask Mr. Beverley," and came towards them, Joe looking on with a broad grin on his face. "He's not like you—he's sensible and serious." After a quick glance over her shoulder at Joe, she addressed the author. "Oh, Mr. Beverley, you're a literary man and all that. Tell me, do you say 'ee-ther' or 'eye-ther'?" Her face was a picture of innocent gravity.

"Eye-ther," replied the eminent author promptly.

"But which?"

"Eye-ther."

"Oh, but haven't you a choice?"

"I tell you I say 'eye-ther,' Miss Layard."

Joe sniggered. Arthur began to smile slowly, as the joke dawned upon him.

"Just as it happens—or alternately—or on Sundays and week-days, or what, Mr. Beverley?"

"I've told you three times already that I say——" He stopped, looked at her sourly, and fell back in his stall, muttering something that sounded very like "Damned nonsense!"

"I thought I could pull your leg!" she cried exultantly, and burst into the merriest peal of laughter—sweet ringing laughter that set Arthur laughing too in sympathy. She was indeed all that Joe had said when she laughed like that. She was irresistible. If only Mr. Beverley had given her opportunity enough for laughter, *Did you Say Mrs.?* must surely be a success!

She saw his eyes fixed on her in delight. "Awfully good, isn't it?" she said. "Because you can't get out of it, whatever you answer!" Her laughter trilled out again, clear, rich, and soft.

"First Act!" called Mr. Etheringham threateningly.

"I'd like to try it on him," she whispered. "Only he's so cross!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE OLD DAYS END

Arthur was an affectionate son and enjoyed going home, yet on this occasion he approached his destination with some uneasiness. Mrs. Lisle was a religious woman, Anna was even more strictly devout; they both professed High Church principles, and though frail health had compelled the mother to give up practical good works the daughter was busily engaged in them. They had lived out of the large world all their lives. Their standards and point of view had none of the easiness and laxity of London drawing-rooms and London clubs. They were not at all modern. Arthur smiled over the thought that Mr. Claud Beverley would probably decline to consider them real, but he did not smile at the prospect of discussing with them the catastrophe of Hilsey. He had broken the terrible news by letter; that was better than announcing it in person and encountering the full force of dismay and reprobation which it must provoke. He had also added; "It is very painful to talk of it and can do no good. Let us forget it when we meet"; but he was extremely doubtful whether this hint would have any effect. Horror does not, unfortunately, preclude curiosity.

At first, however, there was no thought or talk of the sin or the sinner. They had a great piece of news for him, which they had saved up to tell him themselves; they would not waste it on a letter. Anna had become engaged to be married to Ronald Slingsby, the curate of the parish. Another surprise of this kind for Arthur! But here he was unreservedly delighted, and the more so because he had hardly expected that Anna would take, or perhaps would find, a husband; she had always seemed aloof from that sort of thing, too deeply immersed in her pious activities. It was rather strange to see austere Anna stand blushing—actually blushing—by the chair where the frail grey-haired mother sat, and talking about "Ronald" with shy pride and happiness. Ronald had been a fellow-Malvernian of his, and Arthur did not privately think much of him—No need, of course, to say that!

"And he's just devoted to her," said Mrs. Lisle. "Oh, yes, he is, Anna dear! He told us that at first he had scruples about marrying, as he was a priest, but he felt that this great feeling must have been given him for a purpose, and so his conscience became quite reconciled."

"I don't think he would ever have cared for anybody who wasn't interested in his work and couldn't help him in it," Anna added.

"I'd have betted he'd reconcile his conscience all right," smiled Arthur.

"My dear boy, you mustn't be flippant," said his mother in gentle reproof. "I'm very very happy," she went on, "to have Anna settled with a man she can love and trust, before I'm called away; and I'm not nearly as strong as I was. Last winter tried me very much."

"Her cough gets so bad sometimes," said Anna. "But I shall be only across the road, and able to look after her just as well when we're married. Go and get ready for dinner, Arthur. It's been put back till eight o'clock on your account, and Ronald is coming."

Ronald came but, owing to its being a Friday, ate no meat; his betrothed followed his example; bodily weakness excused, on Mrs. Lisle's part, a slice of the white meat of a chicken, both of whose legs were dedicated to Arthur's healthy appetite. Ronald was not a bad-looking fellow, tall, thin, and muscular; he was decidedly ecclesiastical in demeanour and bearing—as well as, of course, in apparel—and this betrayed him sometimes into a sort of *ex cathedra* attitude which his office might justify but his youth certainly did not. Remembering him as an untidy urchin full of tricks only a few years ago, Arthur became a little impatient of it.

At last Mrs. Lisle bethought her of Hilsey. "And how did you leave the poor people?" she asked gently. "You needn't mind speaking before Ronald; he's one of the family now."

"Oh, really, they're—er—bearing up pretty well, mother. It's a bad job, of course, a great shock, and all that, but—well, things'll settle down, I suppose."

"Has anything been heard of the unfortunate woman?" Mrs. Lisle went on.

Arthur did not like the phrase; he flushed a little. "They're abroad, mother. She'll naturally stay there, I should think, till matters are adjusted."

"Adjusted, Arthur?" Anna's request for an interpretation sounded a note of surprise.

"Till after the divorce, I mean."

"Does your cousin intend to apply for a divorce?" asked the happy suitor.

"Bernadette wants one, and he's ready to do anything she wishes."

A long pause fell upon the company—evidently a hostile pause.

"And will the other man go through a form of marriage with her?" asked Ronald.

"Of course he'll marry her. To do Oliver Wyse justice, we needn't be afraid about that."

"Afraid!" Anna exclaimed very low. Mrs. Lisle shook her grey head sadly. "Unhappy creature!" she murmured.

Arthur had been bred in this atmosphere, but coming back to it now he found it strange and unfamiliar. Different from the air of London, profoundly different from the air of Hilsey itself! There they had never thought of Bernadette as an unfortunate woman or an unhappy creature. Their attitude towards her had been quite different. As for his own part in the transaction—well, it was almost amusing to think what would happen at home if the truth of it were told. He had a mischievous impulse to tell Ronald—but, no, he must not risk its getting to his mother's ears.

"And they're abroad together!" mused Mrs. Lisle.

"They're on his yacht—so the lawyers said—somewhere in the Mediterranean."

"How can they?" Anna speculated.

"Unfortunately we must remember that people are capable of a great many things which we cannot understand," said Ronald.

"Her conscience can give the poor thing no peace, I should think." Again Mrs. Lisle shook her head sadly.

"You mustn't think hardly of Bernadette, mother. It—it wasn't altogether her fault that she and Godfrey didn't hit it off. He knows that, I think, himself. I'm sure he'd say so. She had her difficulties and—er—trials."

"Most married women have, my dear, but that's no reason for deserting their husbands and children, and committing the sin that she has committed—and is committing."

"If this unhappy person——" Ronald began.

Arthur might stand it from his mother; he could not from Ronald Slingsby. "If you've nothing pleasant to call people, Slingsby, you might just call them by their names. Bernadette has been a dear good friend to me, and I don't like the phrase you choose to describe her. And I must say, mother, that if you knew the circumstances as well as I do, you'd be more charitable."

"I'm as sorry—as bitterly sorry—as I can be, dear, but——"

"It's more a question of justice than of sorrow."

"Well, how have we been unjust, Arthur?" This question of Anna's was plainly hostile.

"You don't allow for circumstances and—and temptations, and——" He broke off impatiently. "It's really not much good trying to explain."

"I'm inclined to be sorry I ever persuaded you to make their acquaintance," sighed Mrs. Lisle.

Anna's hostility and Ronald Slingsby's prim commiseration annoyed Arthur exceedingly. His mother's attitude towards him touched him more deeply, and to a half-amused yet sincere remorse. It grew more marked with every day of his visit. She showed an affectionate but rather reproachful anxiety about him—about his life, his doings, and his ways of thought. She seemed to fear—indeed she hinted—that his association with the Lisles (which meant, of course, with Bernadette, and for which she persisted in shouldering a responsibility not really belonging to her) might have sapped his morals and induced a laxity in his principles and perhaps—if only she knew all—in his conduct. She evinced a gentle yet persistent curiosity about his work, about his companions and his pursuits in London. She abounded in references to the hopes and anxieties entertained about him by his father; she would add that she knew, understood, and allowed for the temptations of young men; there was the more need to seek strength where alone strength could be found.

Arthur tried hard to banish the element of amusement from his remorse. Although his behaviour in London might stand comparison pretty well with that of many young men of his age and class, yet he was really guilty on all counts of the indictment, and had so found himself by his own verdict before now. He had neglected his work, squandered his money, and declared himself the lover of his cousin's wife. He was as great a sinner, then, as the unfortunate woman herself! It was a bad record, thus baldly summarised. But what, in the end, had that bald summary to do with the true facts of the case, with the way in which things had been induced and had come about? In what conceivable relation, in how remote a degree of verisimilitude, did it stand towards the actual history of those London and Hilsey days? Accept condemnation as he might, his mind pleaded at least for understanding. And the dear frail old woman said she understood!

Moreover—and it is an unlucky thing for weak human nature—moral causes and spiritual appeals are apt, by force of accident or circumstances, to get identified with and, as it were, embodied in personalities which are not sympathetic; they pay the penalty. His mother's anxious affection would have fared better, had Anna not stood so uncompromisingly for propriety of conduct, and Ronald Slingsby for the sanctity of the marriage bond. The pair—to Arthur they seemed already one mind, though not yet one flesh, and he secretly charged Ronald with setting his sister against him—were to him, in plain language, prigs; they applied their principles without the

modifications demanded by common sense, and their formulas without allowance for facts; they passed the same sentence on all offenders of whatever degree of guilt. And yet, after all, as soon as Ronald wanted to marry, he had "reconciled his conscience" without much apparent difficulty! Lack of charity in them bred the like in him. When they cried "Sinners!" he retorted "Pharisees!" and stiffened his neck even against what was true in their accusation.

But in the end his mother's love, and perhaps still more her weakness, won its way with him. He achieved, in some degree at least, the difficult task of looking through her eyes, of realising all the years of care and devotion, all the burden of hopes and fears, which had gone towards setting his feet upon the path of life; all that had been put into the making of him, and had rendered it possible for him to complete the work himself. He could not be as she, in her fond heart, would have him, a child still and always, unspotted from the world, nay, untouched, unformed by it; but he could be something worth being; he could make a return, albeit not the return she asked for. He renewed to her the promises he had made to himself; he would work, he would be prudent, he would order his ways. He took her small thin hand in his and patted it reassuringly, as he sat on a stool by the side of her arm-chair. "I'll be all I haven't been, mother! Still I believe I've learnt a thing or two."

Hardest thing of all, he opened his heart a little—not all the way—about the sinner, about Bernadette.

"If you had known her, mother! It was cruel bad luck for her! She just had to have just what poor old Godfrey hasn't got. Oh, I know all you say but it is much harder for some people than for others. Now isn't it? And to me I can't tell you what she was. If she wants me, I've always got to be a friend to her."

"You were very fond of her, poor boy?"

"Yes, mother. She was so full of kindness, and life, and gaiety, and so beautiful."

"Poor boy!" she said again very softly. She understood something of his adoration; it was as much as it was well for her to know. "We must pray that God, in His good time, will turn her gifts to good uses. Tell me about the others—poor Godfrey, and the little girl, and Judith Arden."

She listened gladly while he told her of Hilsey and how he loved the place, how they all liked him to be there, and of his hope that peace, if not joy, might now be the portion of that house.

"It will be another home to you, and you'll need one soon, I think." He pressed her hand again. "No, my dear, I'm ready. I used to think Anna would make her home with you in London when I was gone, but that won't be now." She sighed. "Better not perhaps! She's at home here, and it mightn't have worked." Another sigh marked her resigned sorrow at the strange differences there were between children. "And her home here—well, it won't be quite the same as home to you, will it?"

Most decidedly not—Ronald Slingsby's house! Arthur could reply only by another squeeze of her hand and a ruefully deprecating smile.

"And some day you'll have a wife and a home of your own." Her mind travelled back to his earlier letters. "What's become of that nice girl you told me about—Miss Sarradet?"

"I've just heard that she's engaged to be married. She didn't wait for me, mother!"

"Oh, well, they were very nice people, I know, but hardly——"

"Not quite up to the Lisles of Hilsey, you mean?" he asked, laughing. "Worldly pride!"

"Anyhow, since she's engaged——" Mrs. Lisle was evidently a little relieved. How near the peril once had been Arthur did not tell her.

"Work now—not wives!" he said gaily. "I want to show you a whacking big brief, before many months are over. Still, don't expect it too confidently."

"Keep friends with your sister. Keep friends with Ronald," she enjoined him. "I don't think he'll rise to distinction in the Church, but he's a good man, Arthur."

"When I'm Lord Chancellor, mother, I'll give him a fat living!"

"You've grown into a fine man, Arthur. You're handsomer than your father was." The gentle voice had grown drowsy and low. He saw that she was falling into a doze—perhaps with a vision of her own youth before her eyes. He did not disengage his hand from hers until she slept.

Thus he came nearer to his mother, and for the sake and remembrance of that blessed his visit home. But to Anna and her future husband any approach was far more difficult. There he seemed met by an obstinate incompatibility. Ronald's outlook, which now governed and bounded Anna's, was entirely professional—with one subject excepted. He was an enthusiast about football. He had been a great player, and Arthur a good one. They fought old battles over again, or recited to one another the deeds of heroes. There are men who, when they meet, always talk about the same subject, because it is the only thing they have in common, and it acts as a bridge between them. Whenever a topic became dangerous, Arthur changed it for football. Football saved the situation between them a hundred times.

"I really never knew how tremendously Ronald was interested in it, till you came this time, Arthur," Anna remarked innocently. "I suppose he thought I wasn't worth talking to about it."

"Of course you weren't, my dear," said Arthur. "What woman is?" He smiled slyly over his successful diplomacy.

But though football may be a useful buffer against collisions of faith and morals, and may even draw hearts together for a season in common humanity, it can hardly form the cement of a home. His mother was right. When once she was gone—and none dared hope long life for her—there would be no home for him in the place of his youth. As he walked over the hills, on the day before he was to return to London, he looked on the prospect with the eye of one who takes farewell. His life henceforth lay elsewhere. The chapter of boyhood and adolescence drew to its close. The last tie that bound him to those days grew slack and would soon give way. He had no more part or lot in this place.

Save for the love of that weak hand which would fain have detained him, but for his own sake beckoned him to go, he was eager to depart. He craved again the fulness of life and activity. He wanted to be at work—to try again and make a better job of it.

"I suppose I shall make an ass of myself again and again, but at any rate I'll work," he said, and put behind him the mocking memory of Henry encountering the Law Reports in full career. *Retro Satanas!* He would work—even though the farce succeeded!

CHAPTER XXVI

RATHER ROMANTIC!

Marie Sarradet's decision had been hastened by a train of events and circumstances which might have been devised expressly to precipitate the issue. The chain started with a letter from Mrs. Veltheim, in which the good lady announced her intention of paying her brother a visit. Mr. Sarradet was nothing loth; he was still poorly, and thought his sister's company and conversation would cheer him up. Marie took a radically opposite view. She knew Aunt Louisa! A persevering bloodhound she was! Once her nose was on the trail, she never gave up. Her nose had scented Arthur Lisle's attentions; she would want to know what had become of them and of him—when, and why, and whither they had taken themselves off. The question arose then—how to evade Aunt Louisa?

It was answered pat—fortune favours the brave, and Sidney Barslow was, both in love and in war, audacious—by a letter from that gentleman. For ten days he and Raymond had walked hard from place to place. Now they proposed to make their headquarters at Bettws-y-Coed for the rest of the trip. "It's done Raymond simply no end of good. He'll be another man by the time we come back. You must want a change too! Why not come down and join us for ten days, and see if Amabel won't come with you? I believe she would. We'd have a rare time—Snowdon, and Beddgelert, and the Hound, and all the rest of it. This is a very romantic spot, with a picturesque stream and surrounded by luxuriantly wooded cliffs and hills——"

Hullo! That was odd from Sidney Barslow, and must have cost him no small effort!

Marie smiled over the effusion. "Oh, he got it out of the guide-book!" she reflected. But it was very significant of what Sidney thought appropriate to his situation.

She mentioned the plan to the old man. He was eager in its favour. The more his own vigour waned, the more he held out his arms to the strong man who had saved his son and who seemed sent by heaven to save his business. To him he would give his daughter with joy and confidence. That the great end of marriages was to help family fortunes was an idea no less deeply enrooted in his *bourgeois* blood than in the august veins of the House of Austria itself. In favouring a match with Arthur Lisle he had not departed from it; at that time the only thing the family had seemed to lack was gentility—which Arthur would supply. But what was gentility beside solvency? He had been compelled to sell securities! He was all for a man of business now.

"Go, my dear, and take Amabel with you, if she'll go. I'll stand treat for both of you."

In spite of those vanished securities! "Pops is keen!" thought Marie, smiling to herself.

And naturally Miss Amabel, though she was careful to convey that the jaunt committed her to nothing, was not going to refuse a free holiday combined with a situation of some romantic interest: not too many of either came her way in life!

Off the girls went, full of glee, and a fine time they had. They found the young men bronzed to a masculine comeliness, teeming with masculine vigour, pleasantly arrogant over the physical strength of the male animal. Little Raymond strutted like a bantam cock. Where was the trembling nerveless creature whom Sidney Barslow had brought back to Regent's Park? Sidney himself was magnificent—like a hunter in prime condition; his flesh all turned to muscle, and his bold eager eyes clear as a child's. What a leader of their expeditions! "Take the train up Snowdon? Not much! I'll carry anybody who gets tired!" he laughed, and in very truth he could have done it. A mighty fellow, glorying in the strong life within him!

He seemed splendid to Amabel. How should he not? Here was a man worthy of her dearly admired Marie. Raymond was privy to his hopes and favoured them, first from admiration and gratitude, next because he knew his father's purpose, and had his own pride to save. He was not to be left in charge of the business. To be postponed to a stranger in blood would be a slur on him in the eyes of his friends and of the staff. But to a brother-in-law, his senior in age and experience—that would not be half so bad! Besides he honestly wished to keep his preserver at hand in case

of need, ready to save him again on occasion; and he was shrewd enough to discern why Sidney had taken so much pains over his salvation. Father, friend, and brother were all of one mind. A chorus of joy and congratulation, of praises for her wisdom, awaited Marie's decision, if it were the right one. In the other event, the best to be hoped for was that affection should hide, more or less completely, a bitter disappointment, an unuttered charge of indifference to the wishes and the interests of those she loved.

Here were valuable allies for Sidney, for in Marie too the sense of family solidarity was strong. The Welsh trip came as an added godsend to him, showing him to the greatest advantage, setting her being astir and shaking her out of her staidness. But in the end he owed most to his resolution and his confidence, to the very simplicity of his view of the matter. How could a fine girl like her refuse a fine man like him? When it came to the point—as soon it should—surely she couldn't do it! She smiled, she was amused, she teased him; but her secret visions were always of surrender and acceptance and, following on them, of a great peace, a transfer of all her cares and troubles to shoulders infinitely powerful.

He thought her romantic; he chose for his moment a moonlight evening, for his scene the old bridge—the Pont-y-Pair. He led her there after dinner, two nights before they were to go back to London. She guessed his purpose; his air was one of determination. She stood looking down into the water, intensely conscious of his presence, though for some minutes he smoked in silence. Indeed the whole place seemed full of his masterful personality; she grew a little afraid. He knocked out his pipe on the parapet of the bridge; some glowing ashes twinkled down to the water and were quenched. She felt her heart beat quick as he put the pipe in his pocket.

"Marie!"

"Yes."

"Come, won't you even look at me?"

She had no power to disobey; she turned her face slowly towards his, though otherwise she did not move.

"Do you like me?"

"Of course I like you, Sidney. You know that."

"Anything more?" Her hands were clasped in front of her, resting on the parapet. He put out his great right hand and covered them. "I love you, Marie. I want you to be my wife."

She turned her face away again; she was trembling, not with fear, but with excitement. She felt his arm about her waist. Then she heard his voice in a low exultant whisper, "You love me, Marie!" It was not a question. She leant back against the strong arm that encircled her. Then his kiss was on her lips.

"But I've never even said 'yes,'" she protested, trembling and laughing.

"I'm saying it for you," he answered in jovial triumph.

"Take me back to the hotel, please, Sidney," she whispered.

"Not a walk first?" He was disappointed.

"As much as you like to-morrow!"

He yielded and took her back. There she fled from him to her own room, but came back in half-an-hour, serene and smiling, to receive praise and embraces from brother and friend. She had thrown herself on her bed and lain there, on her back, very still save for her quick breathing, her eyes very bright—like a captured animal awaiting what treatment it knows not. Only by degrees did she recover calm; with it came the peace of her visions—the sense of the strong right arm encircling and shielding her. The idea that she could ever of her own will, aye, or of her own strength, thrust it away seemed now impossible. If ever woman in the world had a fate foreordained, hers was here!

But Sidney had no thought of fate. By his own right hand and his powerful arm he had gained the victory.

"If you'd told me three or four months ago that I should bring this off, I'd never have believed you," he told Raymond as they rejoiced together over whisky-and-soda, the first they had allowed themselves since they started on the trip. "Never say die! That's the moral. I thought I was done once, though." He screwed up his mouth over the recollection of that quarrel at the tennis courts. "But I got back again all right. It just shows!"

He forgot wherein he was most indebted to fortune, as his present companion might have reminded him. But strong men treat fortune as they treat their fellow-creatures; they use her to their best advantage and take to themselves the credit. The admiring world is content to have it so, and Raymond Sarradet was well content.

"I did think she had a bit of a fancy for that chap Arthur Lisle once," he remarked.

"Well, I thought so too. But, looking back, I don't believe it." He smiled the smile of knowledge and experience. "The best of girls have their little tricks, Raymond, my boy! I don't believe she had, but I fancy she didn't mind my thinking that she had. Do you twig what I mean, old fellow?"

This reading of the past in the light of the present commended itself to both of them.

"Oh, they want tackling, that's what they want!" Sidney told his admiring young companion.

The girls shared a room, and upstairs Amabel was chirping round Marie's bed, perching on it, hopping off it, twittering like an excited canary. What would everybody say—Mr. Sarradet, Mildred, Joe Halliday? The event was calculated to stir even the Olympian melancholy of Claud Beverley! Here too there was an echo of the past—"And Mr. Arthur Lisle can put it in his pipe and smoke it!" she ended, rather viciously. Her loyalty to Marie had never forgiven Arthur for his back-sliding.

"You silly!" said Marie in indulgent reproof. "As if Mr. Lisle would care! He thinks of nobody but his cousin—Mrs. Godfrey Lisle, I mean, you know."

"He did think about somebody else once," nodded Amabel. "Oh, you can't tell me, Marie! But I suppose Mrs. Lisle has turned his head. Well, she is sweetly pretty, and very nice."

"I expect he's quite as fond of her as he ought to be, at all events," smiled Marie.

"Rather romantic, isn't it? Like Paolo! Don't you remember how lovely Paolo was?"

"But Mr. Lisle isn't a bit like that. Still, nobody could have a chance against her." Marie's tone was impartial, impersonal, not at all resentful. Sidney Barslow's triumphant march swept all obstacles from his path, even the guerilla attack of insurgent memories. They could not cause delay or loss; the sputter of their harmless fire rather added a zest. "He was very attractive in his way," she reflected with a smile. "And I really do believe—no, I musn't tell you!"

And in the end she did not. She had, however, said enough to account for Amabel's exclamation of "Well, it's a blessing you didn't! I like Arthur Lisle, but to compare him with Sidney!"

"I've got what I want, anyhow," said Marie, with a luxurious nestling-down on her pillow. "How are you and Raymond getting on?" she added with a laugh.

"Marie, as if I should think of it, as if I should let him say a word, oh, for ever so long! One can't be too careful!"

"But you mustn't make too much of it. He was very young and—and ignorant."

"He's not so ignorant now," Amabel remarked drily.

"Sidney'll keep him in order. You may depend upon that. You see, he can't fool Sidney. He knows too much. He'd know in a minute if Raymond was up to anything."

"Oh, that does make it much safer, of course. Still——" She broke into a giggle—"Perhaps he won't want it after all, Marie!"

"Oh yes, he will, you goose!" said Marie. And so they chattered on till the clock struck midnight.

When Arthur, returned from Malvern, came to congratulate Marie, he found her in a blaze of family glory, the reward of the girl who has done the wise thing and is content with it, who, feeling herself happy in wisdom, enables everybody else to feel comfortable. Old Mr. Sarradet even seemed grateful to Arthur himself for not having deprived him prematurely of a daughter who had developed into such a valuable asset, and been ultimately disposed of to so much greater advantage; at least some warrant for this impression might be found in the mixture of extreme friendliness and sly banter with which he entertained the visitor until Marie made her appearance. As soon as she came, she managed to get rid of her father very promptly; she felt instinctively that the triumphant note was out of place.

Yet she could not hide the great contentment which possessed her; native sincerity made such concealment impossible. Arthur saw her enviable state and, while he smiled, honestly rejoiced. The old sense of comradeship revived in him; he remembered how much happiness he had owed her. The last silly remnant of condescending surprise at her choice vanished.

"It does one good to see you so happy," he declared. "I bask in the rays, Marie!"

"I hope you'll often come and bask—afterwards."

"I will, if you'll let me. We must go on being friends. I want to be better friends with Sidney."

She smiled rather significantly. Arthur laughed. "Oh, that's all over long ago—I was an ass! I mean I want really to know him better."

"He'll be very pleased, though he's still a little afraid of you, I expect. He has improved very much, you know. He's so much more—well, responsible. And think what he's done for us!"

"I know. Joe told me. And he's going into the business?"

"He's going to be the business, I think," she answered, laughing.

"Splendid! And here am I, still a waster! I must get Sidney to reform me too, I think."

"I don't know about that. I expect nobody's allowed to interfere with you!" She smiled roguishly and asked in banter, "How is the wonderful cousin? You've been staying with her, haven't you?"

Arthur started; the smile left his face. The question was like a sudden blow to him. But of course Marie knew nothing of the disaster; she imagined him to be still happily and gaily adoring. She would know soon, though—all the world would; she would read the hard ugly fact in the papers, or hear of it in unkind gossip.

"Of course you haven't heard. There's been trouble. She's left us. She's gone away."

For the first time the Christian name by which she thought of him passed her lips in her

eagerness of sympathy: "Arthur!"

"Yes, about a month ago now. You remember the man she was lunching with that day—Oliver Wyse? He's taken her away."

"Oh, but how terrible! Forgive me for—for——!"

"There's nothing to forgive. You couldn't know. But it'll be common property soon. You—you mustn't think too badly of her, Marie."

But Marie came of a stock that holds by the domestic virtues—for women, at all events. She said nothing; she pursed up her lips ominously. Was she too going to talk about 'the unfortunate woman'? No, she was surely too just to dispose of the matter in that summary fashion! If she understood, she would do justice. The old desire for her sympathy revived in him—for sympathy of mind; he wanted her to look at the affair as he did. To that end she must know more of Bernadette, more of Godfrey and of Oliver Wyse—things that the world at large would never know, though the circle of immediate friends might be well enough aware of them. He tried to hint some of these things to her, in rather halting phrases about uncongeniality, want of tastes in common, not 'hitting it off,' and so forth. But Marie was not much disposed to listen. She would not be at pains to understand. Her concern was for her friend.

"I'm only thinking what it must have meant to you—what it must mean," she said. "Because you were so very very fond of her, weren't you? When did you hear of it?"

"I was in the house when it happened."

Now she listened while he told how Bernadette had gone—told all save his own madness.

"And you had to go through that!" Marie murmured.

"I deserved it. I'd made such a fool of myself," he said.

His self-reproach told her enough of his madness; nay, she read into it even more than the truth.

"How could she let you, when she loved another man all the time?" she cried.

"She never thought about me in that way for a moment. And I——" He broke off. He would not tell the exact truth; but neither would he lie to Marie.

She judged the case in its obvious aspect—a flirt cruelly reckless, a young man enticed and deluded.

"I wouldn't have believed it of her! You deserve and you'll get something better than that! Don't waste another thought on her, Arthur."

"Never mind about me. I want you to see how it happened that Bernadette could——"

"Oh, Bernadette!" Her voice rang in scorn over the name. "Will nothing cure you?"

He smiled, though ruefully. This was not now cold condemnation of his old idol; it was a burst of generous indignation over a friend's wrong. Bernadette's treatment of her husband, her child, her vows, was no longer in Marie's mind; it was the usage of her friend. Could the friend be angry at that?

"Time'll cure me, I suppose—as much as I want to be cured," he said. "And you're just the same jolly good friend you always were, Marie. I came to wish you joy, not to whine about myself—only you happened to ask after her, and I couldn't very well hold my tongue about it. Only do remember that, whatever others may have, I have no grievance—no cause of complaint. Anything that's happened to me I brought on myself."

No use! He saw that, and smiled hopelessly over it. Marie was resolved on having him a victim; he had to give in to her. She had got the idea absolutely fixed in that tenacious mind of hers. He turned back to the legitimate purpose of his visit.

"And when is the wedding to be?"

"In about six weeks. You'll come, won't you, Mr. Lisle?"

But Arthur had noticed what she called him, when moved by sympathy. "Don't go back to that. You called me 'Arthur' just now."

"Did I? I didn't notice. But I shall like to call you Arthur, if I may." She gave him her hand with the frankest heartiness. 'Arthur' felt himself established in a simple and cordial friendship; it was not quite the footing on which 'Mr. Lisle' had stood. Hopes and fears, dreams and sentiment, were gone from her thoughts of him; a great goodwill was the residuum.

Perhaps she was generous to give so much, and Arthur lucky to receive it; and perhaps the news of Bernadette's misdeeds made the measure of it greater. Whatever might have been the case previously, it was now plain as day that, in any respect in which Arthur's past conduct needed excuse, he had not really been a free agent. He had been under a delusion, a spell, a wicked domination. Did ever so fair a face hide such villainy?

The tidings of Arthur's tragedy went forth to the Sarradet household and the Sarradet circle. Sidney Barslow heard of it with a decorous sympathy which masked a secret snigger. Amabel twittered over it, with a new reminiscence of her Paolo—only that ended differently! Joe Halliday had strange phrases in abundance, through which he strove to express a Byronic recognition of love's joy and woe. He told Miss Ayesha Layard, and thereby invested handsome Mr. Lisle with a new romantic interest. The story of the unhappy passion and its end, the flight in early morning of the guilty pair, reached even the ears of Mr. Claud Beverley, who sorrowed as a man that such

things should happen, and deplored as an artist that they should happen in that way.

"There need have been no trouble. Why weren't they all open and sensible about it?" he demanded of Miss Layard—very incautiously.

"Because there's a B in both—and another in your bonnet, old man," the irrepressible lady answered, to his intense disgust.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE HANDS OF THE GODS

Arthur went to several more rehearsals, but as they progressed, as the production took shape and final form, they became to his unaccustomed mind painfully exciting, so full of ups and downs, now ominous of defeat, now presaging glorious victory. What were to the old hands ordinary incidents and everyday vicissitudes were to him tragedies or triumphs. If Mr. Etheringham said "That's better," or "Well, we've got something like it at last," he swelled with assurance, and his pockets with imaginary bullion. Whereas if Mr. Etheringham flung his script down on the table and exclaimed, "Well, it's not *my* money, thank God!"—or if it appeared that there was no sort of chance of the scenery being ready (and there very seldom is)—or if the author looked more melancholy than usual (and Mr. Beverley had an extraordinary and apparently inexhaustible gift for crescendos of melancholy)—Arthur concluded that all was "up," and that the shutters would soon follow the general example. In view of the vital bearing which success had upon his financial position, the strain was great, almost too exciting and thrilling for endurance. More than once he swore that he would not go near the place again—till "the night." But he could not keep his oath. The fascination of the venture drew him back. Besides he was attracted to his co-adventurers—to fiery Mr Etheringham, with his relentless energy, his passionate pessimism and furious outbursts; to the melancholy author, surveying as it were a folly of his youth and reckoning on the stupidity of the public to release him from "the office" and let him "do" real life; to the leading man, war-worn hero of a hundred farces, whose grey locks were to turn to raven-black, and whose girth must suffer hard constriction to dimensions that become a youthful lover—on the night; to Miss Ayesha Layard with the audacious sillinesses which her laughter and her impudent pug-nose made so strangely acceptable. Even though Arthur had really no part in it all, and nothing to do but sit and watch and smoke, he could not keep away—and he rejoiced when somebody would come and sit by, and exchange opinions. It says much for his resolutions of reform that, in spite of all, he spent several hours every day at chambers, trying to bend his mind to *Benjamin on Sales* and, by virtue of the human interest of that remarkable work, succeeding better than was to be expected.

Amidst these occupations and distractions the great trouble which had come upon him was no longer the continual matter of his thoughts. The sense of loss and the conviction of folly—the two were inseparably united in consciousness—became rather enemies lurking in the recesses of his mind, ready to spring out at him in hours of idleness or depression. To prevent or evade their attack was a task to which he set himself more instinctively than of deliberate purpose; but in fact the fear of them—the absolute need of keeping them down unless he were to lose heart—co-operated with the good resolutions he had made and with the new interests which had come into his life. To seek fresh objects of effort and to lay himself open to a new set of impressions—here rather than in brooding, or remorse, or would-be philosophising, lay the path of salvation for a spirit young, ardent, and elastic, healthily averse from mental hypochondria, from nursing and cosseting its wounds. He was in the mood of a football player who, sore from a hack and shaken by a hard tackle, picks himself up and rushes to take his place in the scrimmage.

Three days before "the night"—that date now served him for a calendar—he received a hasty summons from Esther Norton Ward. The lease of the Lisles' house in Hill Street was to be sold, and Judith Arden had come up to town, to settle matters relating to the furniture; some was to be disposed of, some sent to Hilsey. The Norton Wards were at home, the prospective candidate being engaged in an electoral campaign in his prospective constituency, which could be "worked" most easily from London; Judith was to stay a few days with them. Though Norton Ward himself would be away speech-making, the two ladies begged the pleasure of Arthur's company that evening.

"Then Judith will be in town on the night," thought Arthur. His eye gleamed with a brilliant inspiration. On the night he would be the proud possessor of a box at the Burlington Theatre—that, at least, his thousand pounds gave him. He instantly determined to invite his friends to share it with him. He added this invitation of his own when he sent his note accepting Esther's.

"But how comes he to be having boxes at first nights?" asked Esther.

"Oh, don't you know? He's put up some money for the play. Quite a lot, in fact," said Judith, with a laugh which sounded apologetic.

Esther raised her brows. That was not the Norton Ward idea of the way to the Woolsack. "Can he afford to—to do that sort of thing? To take chances like that?"

"Oh, of course not! He's quite poor. But, Esther, I do pray it'll be a success! He does deserve a turn of good luck. He's been splendid to us all at Hilsey."

"He was making a great goose of himself, when I was at Hilsey."

"That was before. I meant he was splendid afterwards. Fancy seeing the play after all! He's often talked to me about it."

"You're very good friends with him now?"

"Well, look what we've been through together! If the piece doesn't succeed, I'm afraid it'll be a serious business for him. He'll be very hard up."

Esther shook her head over Arthur when he came to dinner. "I knew you were a man of fashion! Now you're blossoming out as a theatrical speculator! Where does the law come in?"

"Next Wednesday morning at the very latest—and whatever has happened to *Did You Say Mrs.?* Only, if it's a tumble, I shan't have the money to go circuit, and—well, I hope your husband will get his rent, but I expect he'd be wiser to kick me out of his chambers."

"As bad as that? Then we really must pray, Judith, for Frank's sake as well as Arthur's!"

"Do tell us about the play! Give us an idea of it."

"Oh, well, the plot's not the great thing, you know. It's the way it's written. And Ayesha Layard and Willie Spring are so good. Well, there's a dancing club—a respectable one. A man may take a man, but he may only take a woman if she's his wife or sister. The man Spring plays is persuaded to take a friend and his best girl in, and to let the girl call herself Mrs. Skewes—Skewes is Spring's name in the piece. Well, of course, as soon as he's done that, simply everybody Skewes knows begins to turn up—his rich uncle, the rich girl he wants to marry, his village parson—all the lot. And then the other man's people weigh in, and everybody gets mixed—and so on. And there's a comic waiter who used to know Flo (Ayesha Layard plays Flo, of course) and insists on writing to her mother to say she's married. Oh, it's all awfully well worked out!"

"I'm sure it'll be very amusing," said Esther Norton Ward politely. "But isn't it rather like that farce they had at the—the Piccadilly, wasn't it?—a year or two ago?"

"Oh no! I remember the piece you mean; but that wasn't a dancing club—that was an hotel."

"So it was. I forgot," said Esther, smiling.

Arthur burst into a laugh. "I'm a fool! Of course it's been done a hundred times. But Beverley's got in a lot of good stuff. In the second act Flo has hidden in Skewes' bedroom, and of course everybody turns up there, and he has to get rid of them by pretending he's going to have a bath—keeps taking his coat off, to make 'em clear out." Arthur chuckled at the remembrance. "But of course Ayesha's the finest thing. Her innocent cheek is ripping!"

"Why does she want to hide in his room?"

"She took another woman's bag from the club by accident, and the manager has his suspicions about her and consults the police. But I won't tell you any more, or it'll spoil the evening."

"I think we know quite enough to go on with," laughed Esther. "I wish Frank could come with us, but he's got a meeting every night next week. Why don't you go down with him one night? I think it would amuse you."

"I will, like a shot, if he'll take me. I'm not sure, though, that I'm a Conservative."

"That doesn't matter. Besides Frank will make you one. He's very persuasive."

After Arthur had said good-night and gone, the two women sat in silence for a few minutes.

"It sounds awful stuff, Judith," said Esther at last, in a tone of candid regret.

"Yes, it does. But still those things do succeed often."

"Oh yes, and we'll hope!" She glanced at Judith. "He doesn't seem very—lovelorn!"

"He was pretty bad at first." She smiled faintly. "I had to be awfully disagreeable. Well, I'm quite good at it. Ever since then he's behaved wonderfully. But I don't know what he feels."

"Well, I hope he'll settle down to work, after all this nonsense."

"He hasn't got any work to settle to, poor boy!"

"Frank says it always comes if you watch and wait."

"I expect it's the successful men who say that." They had all been gay at dinner, but now Judith's voice sounded depressed and weary. Esther moved nearer to her side on the sofa.

"You've had a pretty hard time of it too, haven't you?" she asked sympathetically.

"It may be a funny thing, but I miss Bernadette dreadfully. She was always an interest anyhow, wasn't she? And without her—with just Godfrey and Margaret—Hilsey's awfully flat. You see, we're none of us people with naturally high spirits. Arthur is, and they used to crop out in spite of everything; so it wasn't so bad while he was there. Godfrey and Margaret are always wanting to press him to come back, but he must stay and work, mustn't he?"

Esther took a sidelong glance at her—rather an inquisitive glance—but she said no more than, "Of course he must. He can come to you at Christmas—unless he's got another farce or some other nonsense in his head."

Esther had taken Bernadette's flight with just a shrug of her shoulders; that had seemed to her really the only way to take it. She had not been surprised—looking back on her Sunday at Hilsey and remembering Bernadette's manner, she now declared that she had expected the event—and

it was no use pretending to be much shocked. To her steady and calm temperament, very strong in affection but a stranger to passion, a creature of Bernadette's waywardness could assert no real claim to sympathy, however much her charm might be acknowledged. She was surprised that Judith should miss her so much, and with so much regret. For Arthur's infatuation she still could have only scorn, however kindly the scorn might be. In her eyes Bernadette had never been really a wife, and hardly in any true sense a mother; by her flight she merely abdicated positions which she had never effectively filled. She would not even give her credit for courage in going away, in facing the scandal; there she preferred to see only Oliver Wyse's strong hand and imperious will.

On the other hand, there was a true sympathy of mind between her and Judith, and she was grieved, and rather indignant, at the heavy burden which the train of events had laid on Judith's shoulders. She asked something better for her than to be merely the crutch of the crippled household at Hilsey—for which again her self-reliant nature and courageous temper had more pity than esteem. It would be a shame if Judith sank into a household hack, bearing the burden which properly belonged to Bernadette's pretty shoulders. But Judith herself betrayed no sense of hardship; she took what she was doing as a matter of course, though she did regret Bernadette's loss and Arthur's absence. She pined for the vanished elements of excitement and gaiety in the household; but none the less she meant to stick to it. So Esther read her mind. But there was another question—one of proportion. How much of the pining was for Bernadette and how much for Arthur?

It was dress rehearsal. Mr. Etheringham was a martinet about admitting people to this function; there were only half-a-dozen or so scattered about the stalls—and the author prowling restlessly up and down the pit. Mr. Etheringham sat by Arthur, his hat over his fiery eyes, regarding the performance with a sort of gloomy resentment. He interfered only once or twice—his work was done—but Arthur heard him murmur, more than once or twice, "Damned bad—too late to change!"—and therewith he sank a little lower down in his seat. Arthur did not laugh much now, though he expected to to-morrow; he was too busy thinking whether other people would be amused to be amused himself. All he really knew was that Willie Spring was acting his very heart out, trying to get every ounce out of the part; and so was Ayesha, for all her air of utter unconcern. He ventured on an observation to this effect to Mr. Etheringham when the curtain fell on the first act.

"They're all right. If it fails, it's my fault—and Beverley's." He rushed off "behind," and his voice was heard through the curtain in exhortation and correction.

Joe Halliday came across from the other side of the house and sat down in the vacant seat. "Right as rain!" he said emphatically. "You may order your motor car, Arthur."

"I think I won't actually give the order till Wednesday morning, old fellow."

"May as well. It's a cert. Big money! Wish I had your share in it."

"I sometimes wish I had mine out," Arthur confessed.

"Oh, rot, man! It's the stroke of your life, this is."

Mr. Etheringham returned, glared at the imperturbable Joe, and selected another stall. Second Act.

The Second Act went well, but when they came to set the Third, there was a bad breakdown in the scenery. A long long wait—and Mr. Etheringham audible from behind the curtain, raging furiously. Mr. Beverley emerged from the pit and came up behind Joe Halliday and Arthur.

"Just my luck!" he observed, in the apathetic calm of utter despair.

"Jolly good thing it happened to-night, and not to-morrow!" exclaimed Joe.

"But it probably will happen to-morrow too," the author insisted.

Arthur was laughing at the two when Miss Ayesha Layard, in the third of her wonderful frocks, came in front and tripped up to them.

"If anybody's cold, they'd better go behind and listen to old Langley," she remarked, as she sank into the stall by Arthur's side. She had a large towel tied round her waist, and adjusted it carefully beneath and round her before she trusted her frock to the mercies of the seat. "I once spoilt a frock in my early days, and old Bramston boxed my ears for it," she explained to Arthur. Then she turned round and regarded Mr. Beverley with an air of artless and girlish admiration. "To think that he wrote this masterpiece! He who is known to, and will soon be adored by, the public as Claud Beverley, but who in private life——"

"Shut up, will you!" commanded Mr. Beverley with sudden and fierce fury. "If you do happen to—to——" He was in a difficulty for a phrase and ended without finding it—"Well, you might have the decency to hold your tongue about it."

"Sorry, sorry, sorry! Didn't know it was such a secret as all that." The offended man looked implacable. "If you don't forgive me, I shall go and drown myself in that bath! Oh, well, he won't, so never mind! Here, Joe, take him out and give him a drink. There's just time before closing."

"First-rate idea!" Joe agreed cordially. "Come along, old chap." Mr. Beverley allowed himself to be led away, mournfully yet faintly protesting.

"Funny thing he should mind having his real name known, isn't it? I'm sure I shouldn't mind mine being known, if I had one, but I don't think I have. I recollect being called 'Sal' at the theatre. Old

Bramston—the one who boxed my ears, as I said—named me. He'd been out in the East as a young man and liked reading about it. So, when he named me, he combined his information, like the man in Dickens, and made up the name you see on the bills. It'll descend to posterity in old Langley Etheringham's memoirs. He's writing them, his wife told me so. Well, what do you think of the theatre—inside view—Mr. Lisle?"

"I think it's extraordinarily interesting."

"I've been in it all my life, and I wouldn't change. It takes your mind off things so—sort of gives you two lives. You come down here in the blues over your debts, or your love-affairs, or something—and in five minutes you're somebody else, or—" She gave a little laugh—"rotting somebody else, which is nearly as good."

"By Jove, that's exactly what it does do!" cried Arthur. "It's done me heaps of good."

"You'll have got something for your money, anyhow, won't you?"

"Oh, but I want to get more than that!"

"So do I!" she laughed. "I want the salary. But one never knows. This time to-morrow we may be waiting for the laughs that don't come. You can always pretty well hear Willie asking for them in the proper places. And when they don't come, it's such a sell that it makes me want to giggle myself. It might work! What the notices call my infectious laughter!"

"Well, that's just what your laughter is."

"They catch a word like that from one another—like mumps or measles. I'm always 'infectious;' Willie's always 'indefat'—'indefatig'—you know; I can never get to the end of it! Bramston used to be 'sterling' always; it made him just mad when he saw the word—used awful language!" She laughed, "infectiously," at the recollection.

The hammering behind the curtain, which had been incessant during their talk, stopped. A sharp voice rang out, "Third Act!" There was a scurry of feet. Mr. Etheringham came in front, very hot and dishevelled; Mr. Beverley reappeared, only to bolt into his burrow in the pit. Miss Layard rose to her feet, carefully lifting the precious frock well clear of her ankles.

"What do you mean by keeping me waiting like this, Mr. Etheringham?" she asked with elaborate haughtiness.

But poor Mr. Etheringham was at the end of his tether—beyond repartee, even beyond fury.

"For heaven's sake, Ayesha my dear, take hold of this damned third act, and pick it *up*!" he implored, with the old Weary-Titan lift of his hands.

"There is a bit of avoirdupois about it, isn't there?" she remarked sympathetically. "All the same, it's suffered a sea-change under your accomplished hands, Langley."

"Oh, get round, there's a good girl, or you'll keep the stage waiting."

"What one weak woman can do!" she said, with a nod and a smile as she turned away.

Mr. Etheringham sank into a stall and lay back—with his eyes shut. "I should like to have the blood of those stage-hands," Arthur heard him mutter.

His eyes remained closed right through the act; he knew it too well to need to see it—every position, every speech, every inflection, every gesture. He did not speak either; only his hands now and then rose up above his head and dropped again gently. When at last the curtain fell, he opened his eyes, took off his hat, smoothed his hair, replaced the hat, and turned to Arthur with a sudden expression of peace and relief on his stormy countenance.

"Now it's in the hands of the gods, Mr. Lisle," he said.

Arthur was lighting a cigarette. In the intervals of the operation he asked, "Well, what do you think?"

Mr. Etheringham looked at him with a tolerant smile. "Think? My dear fellow, to-morrow's the night! What on earth's the use of thinking?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

TAKING MEDICINE

"Good-night. Thanks awfully for coming, Mrs. Norton Ward! And you too, Judith! Beg pardon? Oh, yes, I hope so—with just a few alterations. Wants a bit of pulling together, doesn't it? What? Oh, yes, only quite a few—one fellow in the gallery really started it. What? Oh, yes, up till then it was all right—Yes, it will be really, I'm sure. Still I wish——"

"Move up there!" from the policeman.

"All the same I wish—Well, good-night. See you soon, shan't I?"

Thus Arthur, outside the Burlington Theatre, bade farewell to the two ladies who had honoured his box with their presence—Arthur very suave, collected, smiling, easy, but rather pale in the face. Under pressure from the policeman, Esther's car drove off.

Esther gave a long sigh of relief. Judith had thrown herself back in the other corner.

"It was very kind of him to take us," said Esther, "but really what a trying evening, Judith! At first it seemed all right—I laughed anyhow—but then—Oh, of course, they'd no business to boo; it's rude and horrid. I was so sorry for them all—especially that pretty girl and the poor man who worked so hard. Still, you know, I couldn't see that it was *very* funny."

No answer came from Judith's corner.

"And a farce ought to be funny, oughtn't it?" Esther resumed. "Some plays one goes to without expecting to be amused, of course, or—or even thrilled, or anything of that sort. One goes to be—to be—well, because of one's interest in the drama. But I always look forward to a farce; I expect to enjoy myself at it."

Still no answer from Judith in the corner.

"And really I don't think I'll ever go again with anybody who's got anything to do with the play. You felt him expecting you to laugh—and you couldn't! Or you laughed in the wrong place. He didn't laugh much himself, if you come to that. Too anxious perhaps! And when he went out between the acts and came back, and you asked him what the men were saying, and he said, 'Oh, they always try to crab it!'—Well, that didn't make it any more cheerful, did it?"

Response being still lacking, and Esther having pretty well exhausted her own impressions of the first night of *Did You Say Mrs.?* at the Burlington, she peered enquiringly into the other corner of the car.

"Are you asleep, Judith?" she asked.

"No, I'm not asleep. Never mind me, Esther."

"Well, why don't you say something?"

"What is there to say?"

Esther peered more perseveringly into the corner. Then she stretched out her hand towards the switch of the electric light.

"Don't," said Judith, very sharply.

Esther's eyes grew wide. "Why, you silly girl, I believe you're——!"

"Yes, I am, and it's a very good thing to cry over. Think of all those poor people, working so hard, and—it's all for nothing, I suppose! And Arthur! How brave he was over it! He couldn't have been more—more attentive and—and gay if it had been the greatest success. But I knew what he was feeling. I laughed like a maniac—and my hands are sore. What's the use? Who's the idiot who wrote it?"

"Well, if you come to that, I daresay the poor man is just as much upset as Arthur Lisle is."

Judith was in no mood for impartial justice. "Getting them to produce a thing like that is almost obtaining money under false pretences. Why don't they *know*, Esther?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It's easy enough to tell when you see it."

"I was awfully frightened even when he told us about it."

"At dinner, you mean? Yes, so was I. But it was no use saying——"

"Oh, of course, it was no use saying anything about it! What will he do now? Will he get any of his money back, I wonder!" Judith might be seen through the gloom dabbing her cheeks forlornly. "And I did think it was going to be a jolly evening!" she ended.

"It wasn't that," Esther observed with ample emphasis. Protected by the gloom, she drew nearer to Judith, put her arm round her, and kissed her. "You mustn't mind so much," she whispered. "Men have to take tumbles all the time, and Arthur took his bravely."

"Oh, after the other thing it is such hard luck! And I—we—didn't know how to—to help or console him. I wish Bernadette had been there! She'd have known how to do that."

Esther frowned at the idea of this very desperate remedy. A forlorn silence fell on the car, till they reached home and got out. In the hall Esther laid a hand on Judith's arm.

"Frank will be back by now. Are you equal to facing him?" she asked.

"I'd sooner not, if you don't mind. I shall go to bed."

"Don't fret. Perhaps they will—pull it together, didn't he say?—really!"

Judith shook her head mournfully and trailed off upstairs to bed. The hostess stood watching her guest's progress for a moment with what seemed a rather critical eye, and then went in to her husband's study.

Frank Norton Ward was seated in front of a tray, and was consuming cold beef and claret with an excellent appetite. An open-air meeting at seven, followed by a church bazaar (with "a few words" from the prospective candidate) from eight-thirty till ten, had been his useful, honourable, but exhausting evening.

"Well, here you are!" he greeted his wife cheerfully. "Had a good time, Esther?"

His question opened the gates again to the doleful flood of Esther's impressions. Her husband listened with a smile; to the detached mind a fiasco has always its amusing side, and Norton Ward was by no means particularly concerned about Arthur or his fortunes. He finished his claret

and lit his pipe during the sorrowful recital, and at the end of it remarked, "Well, it serves him right, really. That sort of thing won't do him any good—it's not his job—and perhaps now he'll see it. Didn't Judith come in with you?"

"She's gone to bed."

"Oh, has she? I say, I had a jolly good meeting to-night—though it's supposed to be a Radical centre. I——"

"She was reduced to tears, coming home in the car. Tears, Frank!"

"That's rather a strong order, isn't it? She'll be all right in the morning. The fact is, there's been a good deal of trouble at the biscuit works, and since old Thorne's a Liberal, his men——"

"She must be a good deal—well, interested in him to do that!"

"Wouldn't mind giving him one in the eye. What? I beg your pardon, my dear?"

Even in the happiest marriages husband and wife do not always pursue the same train of thought. But Esther was very dutiful. "Never mind! Tell me about the meeting," she said. But she went on thinking of Judith and her tears.

After he had seen his friends off, Arthur turned back into the lobby of the theatre. The crowd, that destructive crowd, was thinning quickly; at the tail-end of it there came, hurrying along, a figure vaguely familiar. The next instant its identity was established. There was no mistaking the tremor of the eye. It was Mr. Mayne, of Wills and Mayne, of *Tiddes v. The Universal Omnibus Company, Limited.*. As he came up, he saw Arthur, and gave him a quick glance and a faint smile, but no express recognition. He hurried by, as it were furtively, and, before Arthur had time to claim acquaintance, disappeared into the street. "Shouldn't have imagined he was much of a first-nighter!" thought Arthur, as he made his way towards a little group standing by the Box Office.

The two Sarradet men were there, talking in low voices but volubly, gesticulating, looking very angry and somehow unusually French. Marie stood with her arm in Sidney Barslow's, rather as if she needed his support, and the big man himself, smiling composedly, seemed as though he were protecting the family. Fronting them stood Joe Halliday, smoking a cigarette and listening to the voluble talk with a pleasant smile.

But when the two men saw Arthur, their talk stopped—silenced perhaps by the presence of a pecuniary disaster greater than that which had befallen the Sarradet house. Joe seized his opportunity and remarked, "After all, Mr. Sarradet, you didn't exactly suppose you were investing in a gilt-edged security!"

"I say, where's poor old Beverley?" Arthur asked.

"Behind, I think—talking it over with Etheringham. Well, let 'em talk!" He shaped his lips for a whistle, but thought better of it. "We'll have another flutter some day, Mr. Sarradet!" he remarked with an air of genial encouragement.

"Flutter!" The old man was choking with indignation. "If I ever——!"

"Well, we'd best be getting home," Sidney interposed, with an authority which made the suggestion an order. "Come along, Marie."

"Bring Pops, Raymond," Marie directed. She gave her free hand to Arthur, raising mournful eyes to his. "What a terrible experience!" she murmured.

"He calls it a flutter!"—A fragment of old Sarradet's indignation was blown back from the pavement into the lobby.

"Not sports!" Joe mused regretfully. "Not what I call sports, Arthur! I'm really rather sorry we didn't manage to rope old Sidney in too. Looking so dashed wise, wasn't he? Come along, let's find Claud—and I want to see Ayesha."

"I suppose we shall have to settle what's to be done about it, shan't we?"

"We'll hear what Langley thinks."

They found a little party in Mr. Etheringham's room—that gentleman himself, standing with his back to the fireplace, smoking a cigar; Willie Spring, an exhausted volcano, lying back in a chair, staring at the ceiling; Miss Ayesha Layard on the sofa, smiling demurely; and the author seated at the table with the script of the play in front of him; he was turning over the leaves quickly and with an appearance of eager industry.

"Now we know what to think, don't we, Mr. Lisle? They've done our thinking for us." Mr. Etheringham smiled quite pleasantly. He was not at all fiery now.

Arthur laid his hand on Mr. Beverley's shoulder. "It's an infernal shame, old chap. I'm most awfully sorry."

"You gentlemen are two of the principal shareholders," Mr. Etheringham went on to Arthur and Joe. "Perhaps you'd like to talk over the situation privately?"

"We're all right as we are—glad of words of wisdom from any of you! How do we stand, Langley?" said Joe, sitting down on the sofa by Miss Layard. "What's the situation?"

"Well, you know that as well as I do. There's the production to be paid—about twelve hundred, I reckon—and we run into about eight hundred a week."

"And what—if any—business shall we play to?"

"You can't tell that. You can only guess—and you'd better not guess high! I should say myself that the money might last a fortnight—possibly three weeks. Some of 'em'll probably look in now and then, you know—and even if we paper the whole house, the bars bring in a bit."

"I'd go a bit more," said Joe, "only the truth is I haven't got a bob—absolutely stony!" He jingled the money in his pocket. "Hear that—it's the last of it!"

"If you think there's any chance," Arthur began eagerly, "I think I could——"

Mr. Willie Spring's eyes came down from the ceiling and sought those of Mr. Etheringham; Mr. Spring also shook his head very slightly and smiled a tired smile.

"I don't think we'd better talk about that at this stage," said Mr. Etheringham. "At least that's my advice. Of course, if later on the business warranted the hope that——"

"Well, anyhow, let's go on as long as the money lasts," said Arthur.

"All right. Can you be ready with those cuts and the new lines by to-morrow afternoon, Beverley?"

"Yes." He had never stopped turning over the pages of the script.

"Very well, I'll call a rehearsal for two o'clock."

Ayesha Layard rose from the sofa. "Well, good-night," she said.

"May I wait for you?" asked Joe.

"Yes, if you like, but I want to speak to Mr. Lisle first." As she passed Arthur, she took hold of his arm and led him to her dressing-room. "Just a second!" she said to her dresser. When the woman had gone out, she planted herself in the chair before the looking-glass and regarded Arthur with a smile. "Were you really ready to put up more money?" she asked. "Are you a millionaire? Because you're not in love with me, and that's the only other thing that might explain it."

"I hate being beat," Arthur protested.

"Happened to you before, hasn't it? In other directions, I mean."

Just as he was looking at her, wondering how much she knew—for something she evidently knew—a knock came at the door, and the dresser appeared with a telegram in her hand. "You're Mr. Lisle, sir, aren't you? This came for you just as the curtain went up, and it got forgotten till now." She gave it to Arthur and went out again.

"May I read it?" He opened it. "Good luck to you to-night. I wish I could be with you, but circumstances don't permit—Bernadette." The despatch came from Genoa. Bernadette had looked out for the doings of *Did You Say Mrs.?* in the English papers!

"Yes, it's happened to me before," said Arthur, smiling rather grimly. He put the piece of paper into her hands. "A telegram of good wishes—come to hand rather late."

"Bernadette? A lady friend? Oh, I remember! *The* lady-friend, isn't it? She thinks of you! Touching!"

"I find it so, rather. But, I say, aren't you tired to death?"

"Next door! But I just wanted to say good-bye to you. I like you, you know. You're pleasant, and you lose like a gentleman, and you haven't rounded on Willie and me, and told us it's all our fault."

"Your fault indeed! You were splendid. And mayn't it be just good-night, and not good-bye, Miss Layard?"

"Call it which you like. I know what it will be. This isn't your line, really. Good-night then—and don't give Joe any more money. He'd break the Bank of England, if they'd let him."

"I won't then. And I like you, if I may say so. And we're all tremendously in your debt." He raised the hand she gave him to his lips and kissed it in a courtly fashion.

He looked handsome as he did it, and she was amused that he should do it. She looked up at him with dancing eyes and a merry laugh. "Kiss me good-bye, then, really, if you mean it—and don't be too disgusted with all of us to-morrow morning!"

He kissed her cheek, laughing. "*Au revoir!* I shan't be disgusted with you anyhow. Good-night."

He walked to the door, and was just going to open it when she spoke again. "Mr. Lisle!"

"Yes." He turned round. She was standing by the table now; her face was very bright; she seemed to struggle against another spasm of laughter. "In the stress of business you've forgotten your telegram from—Bernadette!" She waved the missive in her hand, holding her mutinous lips closely together.

Arthur stood for a moment, looking at the lady and the missive. Then he broke into a hearty roar; she let herself go too; their laughter rang through the little room. The door was flung open, and Joe Halliday appeared on the threshold in a state of some indignation.

"Pretty good to keep me waiting out in the cold while you—what have you been up to, Ayesha?"

"Nothing that concerns you, Joe. I've been giving Mr. Lisle some medicine."

"I should have thought we'd all had enough of that to-night!"

"It's a different sort—and different from any I shall give you. But I think it did him good, from the

symptoms. Oh, here's your wire, Mr. Lisle!"

She seemed to sparkle with mischief as she gave it to him. "Now mind you don't give Joe any medicine!" he said.

"The bottle's finished, for to-night at all events." With this gay promise and a gay nod she let him go.

Pleased at the promise—quite absurdly pleased at it, in spite of its strict time-limit—and amused with the whole episode, he put Bernadette's telegram in his pocket, and walked along towards the stage-door, smiling happily. He was not thinking about the telegram, nor about the fiasco of the evening, nor of his thousand pounds, very little or none of which would ever find its way back into his pocket. The emotions which each and all of these subjects for contemplation might have been expected to raise had been put to rout. A very fine medicine, that of Miss Ayesha Layard's!

He said good-night to the doorkeeper and gave him a sovereign; he said good-night to the fireman and gave him ten shillings; it was no moment for small economies, and he was minded to march out with colours flying. But he was not quite done with the Burlington Theatre yet. Outside was a tall figure which moved to his side directly he appeared. It was Mr. Claud Beverley, carrying his play in a large square envelope.

"Are you going anywhere, Lisle?" he asked.

"Only home—up Bloomsbury way."

"May I walk with you! The tube at Tottenham Court Road suits me to get home."

"Why, of course! Come along, old chap." They started off together up Shaftesbury Avenue. Mr. Beverley said nothing till they had got as far as the Palace Theatre. Then he managed to unburden his heart.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am to—to have let you in like this, Lisle. I feel pretty badly about it, I can tell you, for all their sakes. But you've been specially—well, you took me on trust, and I've let you in."

"My dear fellow, it's all right. It's much worse for you than for me. But I hope the new play will put you all right."

The author would not be silenced. "And I want to say that if ever I can do you a turn—a real good turn—I'll do it. If it's to be done, I'll do it!"

"I'm sure you will," said Arthur, who did not in the least see what Mr. Beverley could do for him, but was touched by his evident sincerity.

"There's my hand on it," said Mr. Beverley with solemnity. There in Charing Cross Road they shook hands on the bargain. "Don't forget! Good-night, Lisle. Don't forget!" He darted away across the road and vanished into the bowels of the earth.

Arthur Lisle strolled on to his lodgings, humming a tune. Good sort, weren't they, all of them? Suddenly he yawned, and became aware of feeling very tired. Been an evening, hadn't it?

Half-an-hour later he tumbled into bed, with a happy smile still on his lips. He could not get the picture of that girl waving the telegram at him out of his head.

CHAPTER XXIX

TEARS AND A SMILE

IN the end the Syndicate left to Joe Halliday the responsibility of deciding on the future of the unfortunate farce, so far as it had a future on which to decide. On mature reflection Joe was for acting on the sound business principle of 'cutting a loss,' and the turn of events reinforced his opinion. They had taken the Burlington for four weeks certain, and the liability for rent was a serious fact and a heavy item to reckon with. Another dramatic venture wanted a home, and Joe had the opportunity of sub-letting the theatre for the last two weeks of the term. By and with the advice of Mr. Etheringham he closed with the offer. *Did You Say Mrs?* dragged on for its fortnight, never showing vitality enough to inspire any hope of its recovering from the rude blow of the first night. In the day-time new figures filled the stage of the Burlington, new hopes and fears centred there. Only Mr. Etheringham remained, producing the new venture with the same fiery and inexhaustible energy, lifting dead weights with his hands, toiling, moiling, in perpetual strife. Gone soon were all the others who had become so familiar, from the great Mr. Spring, the Indefatigable, downwards, some to other engagements, some left "out"—*débris* from the wreck of the unhappy *Did You Say Mrs?*

Gone too, soon, was Miss Ayesha Layard with her infectious laugh. For her sake Arthur had sat through the farce once again—not even for her sake twice, so inconceivably flat had it now become to him. He had gone round and seen her, but she had other guests and no real conversation was possible. Then he saw in the papers that she was to go to America; a manager from that country had come to see the piece, and, though he did not take that, he did take Miss Layard, with whose talents he was much struck. He offered a handsome salary, and she jumped at it. Joe let her go three days before the end of the hopeless little run. One of the last items of

the Syndicate's expenditure was a bouquet of flowers, presented to her at Euston on the morning of her departure. Arthur went to see her off, found her surrounded by folk strange to him, had just a hand-clasp, a hearty greeting, a merry flash from her eyes, and, as he walked off, the echo of her laugh for a moment in his ears. The changes and chances of theatrical life carried her out of his orbit as suddenly as she had come into it; she left behind her, as chief legacy, just that vivid memory which linked her so fantastically with Bernadette.

So the whole thing seemed to him to end—the Syndicate, the speculation, his voyage into the unknown seas of the theatre. It was all over, shattered by a blow almost as sudden, almost as tragical, as that which had smitten his adoration itself. Both of these things, always connected together for him by subtle bonds of thought and emotion, making together the chief preoccupation of the last six months of his life, now passed out of it, and could occupy his days no longer. They had come like visions—Bernadette in her barouche, the glittering thousands dangled in Fortune's hand—and seemed now to depart in like fashion, transitory and unsubstantial.

Yet to Arthur Lisle they stood as the two greatest things that had up to now happened in his life, the most significant and the most vivid. Set together—as they insisted on being set together from the beginning to the end, from the first impulse of ambition roused by Bernadette to the coming of her telegram on that momentous evening—they made his first great venture, his most notable experience. They had revealed and developed his nature, plumbed feeling and tested courage. He was different now from Marie Sarradet's placid, contented, half-condescending wooer, different from him who had worshipped Bernadette with virgin eyes—different now even from the forsaken and remorseful lover of that black hour at Hilsey. He had received an initiation—a beginning of wisdom, an opening of the eyes, a glimpse of what a man's life may be and hold and do for him. He had seen lights glimmering on the surface of other lives, and now and then, however dimly and fitfully, revealing their deeper waters.

Sitting among the ruins—if tangible results were regarded, scarcely any other word could be considered appropriate—and acutely awake to what had happened to his fortunes, he was vaguely conscious of what had happened to himself. The feeling forbade remorse or despair; it engendered courage. It enabled him to infuse even a dash of humour into his retrospect of the past and his survey of the present. If he still called himself a fool, he did it more good-naturedly, and perhaps really more in deference to the Wisdom of the Wise and the Prudence of the Elders than out of any genuine or deep-seated conviction. And anyhow, if he had been a fool, he reckoned that he had learnt something from it. Everybody must be a fool sometimes. In prudent eyes he had been a tolerably complete one, and had paid and must pay for the indulgence. But it had not been all loss—so his spirit insisted, and refused sack-cloth and ashes for its wear.

Meanwhile, however, the bill! Not the rather nebulous balance-sheet of his soul's gains and losses, but the debit account in hard cash. A few sovereigns from the five hundred still jingled forlornly in his pocket; a few might possibly, thanks to the sub-let, stray back from the Burlington Theatre, but not many. In round figures he was fifteen hundred pounds out, and was left with an income barely exceeding a hundred pounds a year. Now that would not support the life and meet the necessary expenses of counsel learned in the law. Other prospects he had none; what his mother had Anna was to take. He did not want to give up the Bar; he still remembered Mr. Tiddes with a thrill; Wills and Mayne were alive—at any rate Mayne was; a third defeat from fortune was not to his liking. Moreover to abandon his chosen career would nearly break his mother's heart. He came to a swift determination to "stick it out" until he had only a thousand pounds left. If that moment came, a plunge into something new! For the present, all useful expenditure, but strict economy! He instructed his broker to sell out two hundred pounds' worth of stock and felt that he had achieved a satisfactory solution of his financial troubles.

For a mind bent on industry—and Arthur flattered himself that his really was now—his chambers offered new opportunities. Norton Ward had got his silk gown. His pupils had disappeared; Arthur could have the run of his work, could annotate and summarise briefs, and try his hand on draft "opinions." This was much more alluring work than reading at large. He could sit in court too, and watch the progress of the cases with a paternal, a keener, and a more instructed interest. This was how he planned to spend the winter sittings, rejecting the idea of going circuit—the chances of gain were so small, the expenses involved so great. But in the immediate future things fell out differently from what he had planned.

The morning after the Courts opened, he received a summons to go and see Mr. Justice Lance in his private room. The old Judge gave him a very friendly greeting and, being due to take his seat in five minutes, opened his business promptly.

"My old friend Horace Derwent, who generally comes with me as Marshal, is down with influenza and won't be available for three or four weeks. Esther Norton Ward was at my house yesterday and, when she heard it, she suggested that perhaps you'd like to take his place. I shall be very glad to take you, if you care to come. If anything crops up for you here, you can run up—because Marshals aren't absolutely indispensable to the administration of justice. Your function is to add to my comfort and dignity—and I shan't let that stand in your way."

"It's most awfully kind of you. I shall be delighted," said Arthur.

"Very well. We start on Monday, and open the Commission at Raylesbury. My clerk will let you know all the details. If you sit in court regularly, I don't think your time will be wasted, and a grateful country pays you two guineas a day—not unacceptable, possibly, at this moment!" His eyes twinkled. Arthur felt that his theatrical speculation had become known.

"It's uncommonly acceptable, I assure you, Sir Christopher," said he.

"Then let's hope poor Horace Derwent will make a leisurely convalescence," smiled the Judge.

In high spirits at the windfall, Arthur started off in the afternoon to thank Esther for her good offices. He had not seen her since they parted, with forced cheerfulness, at the doors of the Burlington Theatre; neither had he carried out his idea of going to one of her husband's meetings; the urgency of his own affairs would have dwarfed those of the nation in his eyes, even had his taste for politics been greater than it was.

"I thought you'd like it. You'll find Sir Christopher a pleasant chief, and perhaps it'll keep you out of mischief for a few weeks—and in pocket-money," said Esther, in reply to his thanks.

"I've got no more mischief in view," Arthur remarked, almost wistfully. "My wild course is run."

"I hope so. Did you ever believe in that terrible farce?"

"Oh yes, rather! That is, I believed in it generally—Moments of qualm! That's what made it so interesting."

"That evening, Arthur! I declare I still shudder! What did you do after you got rid of us? Knock your head against the wall, or go to bed to hide your tears?"

Arthur smiled. "Not exactly, Mrs. Norton Ward. I took part in a sort of Privy Council, about ways and means, though there weren't any of either, to speak of—and Claud Beverley swore eternal friendship to me, heavens knows why! And I had a talk with Miss Layard."

Esther was looking at his smiling face in some amazement; he seemed to find the memory of the evening pleasant and amusing. Her own impressions were so different that she was stirred to resentment. "I believe I wasted some good emotion on you," she observed severely.

"Oh, I forgot! I had a telegram from Bernadette—from Genoa. Good wishes, you know—but I never got it till it was all over." He was smiling still, in a ruminative way now.

"Very attentive of her! It seems to amuse you, though."

"Well, it was rather funny. It came when I was in Ayesha Layard's dressing-room, talking to her, and she—well, rather made fun of it."

Esther eyed him with curiosity. "Did you like that?" she asked.

"I didn't seem to mind it at the time." His tone was amused still, but just a little puzzled. "No, I didn't mind it."

"I believe—yes, I do—I believe you were flirting with the impudent little creature! Oh, you men! This is what we get! We cry our eyes out for you, and all the time you're——!"

"Men must work and women must weep!" said Arthur.

"That's just what Judith was doing—literally—all the way home in the car; and in bed afterwards, very likely." Esther rapped out the disclosure tartly. "And all the while you were——!" Words failed the indignant woman.

"Cried? What, not really? Poor old Judith! What a shame! I must write to her and tell her I'm as jolly as possible."

"Oh, I daresay she's got over it by now," said Esther, with a dig at his vanity. But he accepted the suggestion with a cheerful alacrity which disappointed her malice.

"Of course she has! She's a sensible girl. What's the good of crying?"

"Would you have liked to be asked that at all moments of your life, Arthur?"

He laughed. "Rather a searching question sometimes, isn't it? But poor Judith! I had no idea——" His remorse, though genuine enough, was still tinged with amusement. The smile lurked about his mouth.

Esther's resentment, never very serious, melted away. In the end there was something attractive in his disposition to refuse even a sympathy which was too soft. She thought that she saw change there. Hard knocks had been chipping off a youthful veneer of sentimentality. But she would not have him impute a silly softness to Judith. "And Judith's not a crying woman. I know her," she said.

"I know. She's got no end of courage. That's why it's so queer."

"She thought your heart was broken, you see."

"Yes, but—well, I think she ought to know me better than that."

"Perhaps she doesn't always keep up with you," Esther suggested.

Rather to her surprise he let the suggestion go by, and did not seize the opportunity it offered of considering or discussing himself—his character and its development. Instead, he began to talk about the Marshalship once more, full of interest and pleasure in it, looking forward to the companionship of Sir Christopher, to seeing and learning, to the touches of old pomp and ceremony in which he was to assist, unimportantly indeed, but as a favourably placed spectator.

"I'm more grateful to you than I can say," he declared. "And not for the two guineas a day only!"

His gratitude gave her pleasure, but she could not understand his mood fully. Her nature moved steadily and equably on its own lines; so far as she could remember, it always had, aided thereto by the favouring circumstances of assured position, easy means, and a satisfactory marriage. She did not appreciate the young man's reaction after a long period of emotion and excitement, of

engrossment in his personal feelings and fortunes. With these he was, for the moment, surfeited, and disposed, consequently, to turn on them a critical, almost a satiric, eye. The need of his mind now was for calmer interests, more impersonal subjects of observation and thought. He was looking forward to being a spectator, a student of other people's lives, acts, and conditions—he was welcoming the prospect of a period during which his mind would be turned outward towards the world. He had had enough of himself for the time being.

It was not, then, a moment in which he was likely to ask himself very curiously the meaning of Judith's tears, or to find in them much stuff to feed either remorse or vanity. He was touched, he was a little ashamed, though with twitching lips, as he contrasted them with his farewell to Ayesha Layard at approximately the same moment. But on the whole he felt relieved of a matter with which he had little inclination to occupy himself when Esther said, at parting, "I think on the whole you'd better not say anything to Judith about what I told you; she might be angry with me for giving her away."

Judith might well have thought herself betrayed by the disclosure which Esther had made in her irritated curiosity, in her resentful desire to confront the smiling young man with the pathetic picture of a girl in tears. When a woman says to a man, of another woman, "See how fond she is of you!" there is generally implied the reproach, "And you under-rate, you slight, you don't return, her affection." Such a reproach had certainly underlain the contrast Esther drew between Judith's tears and the smiles in which Arthur had presumably indulged during his talk with Ayesha Layard. But Arthur took the contrast lightly; it did not really come home to him; he did not seek to explore its possible meaning, the suggestion contained in it. Lightly too he seemed to have taken Bernadette's telegram—her recollection of him at a crisis of his fortunes, coming out of the silence and darkness in which her flight had wrapped her. Here was a thing which might surely have moved him to emotion, rousing poignant memories? But when Miss Ayesha Layard rather made fun of it, he had not minded! Even this account of what had happened—this faint adumbration of the truth—agreed ill with Esther's previous conception of him.

But it was of a piece with his new mood, with the present turn of his feelings under the stress of fortune. To this mood matters appertaining to women—to use the old phrase, the female interest—did not belong. He was liberated for the time from the attack of that, from his obsession with it, and in his freedom was turning a detached, a critical, eye on his days of bondage. Rather oddly it had been a woman's work, not indeed to bring about his release, but still to mark the moment when he began to be conscious of it; for the turn of the tide of his mind was marked by the moment when, in kissing Ayesha Layard, he forgot his telegram. That little episode satirically mocked the erstwhile devotee and the inconsolable lover, and all the more because it hovered itself pleasantly near the confines of sentiment. It pointedly and recurringly reminded him that there were more women than one in the world, that there were, in fact, a great many. And when a young man's heart is open to the consideration that there are a great many women in the world, it is, for all serious purposes, much the same with him as though there were none.

Esther Norton Ward was not in possession of the full facts, or she might better have understood why Arthur's smile had resisted even the appeal of Judith's tears.

On the last evening before he left London, he dined with Joe Halliday and, with a heart opened by good wine, Joe gave his personal view of the Burlington Theatre disaster.

"I'm sorry I let the Sarradets and Amabel in," he said, "and of course I'm awfully sorry I stuck you for such a lot—though that was a good deal your own doing——"

"It was all my own doing," Arthur protested.

"And I'm sorry for everybody involved, but for myself I don't care much. As long as a fellow's got a dinner inside him and five quid in his pocket, what's there to worry about? I've got lots of other jobs maturing. In fact, as far as I'm personally concerned, perhaps it's rather a good thing we did take such a toss. The fact is, old chap, I was getting most infernally gone on Ayesha."

"I thought you were touched! Well, she's very attractive."

"You're right! If we'd run a hundred nights, I should have been a fair goner! And on the straight too, mind you! Even as it is, I don't mind telling you—as a pal—that I'm hardly my usual bright self since she went to Yankeeland. Keep thinking what's she up to—like a silly ass! Beastly! And what did I get out of it? Nothing!" His voice grew plaintively indignant. "On my word, not so much as that, Arthur!" With the words he put two fingers to his lips and flung a kiss to the empty air.

"That was rather hard lines," Arthur remarked, smiling, pleased to hear that, so far as Joe was concerned at least, Miss Ayesha's promise about her medicine had been handsomely kept.

"Well, I suppose you wouldn't notice it much"—(A veiled allusion to the Romantic and Forsaken Lover!)—"but she's enough to make any man make a fool of himself over her." He heaved a ponderous sigh. "I expect I'm well out of it! She'd never have given me more than a string of beads to play with. And if by a miracle she had succumbed to my charms, I should have been as jealous as a dog every time she went to the theatre! No sound way out of it! All just silly!" He looked up and caught Arthur smiling at him. He burst into a laugh, "Lord, what an ass I am! Come along, old chap! If we get moving, we shall be just in time to see Trixie Kayper at the Amphitheatre. I hear she knocks stars out of High Heaven with her twinkling feet!"

Arthur agreed that the performance was one not to be missed.

CHAPTER XXX

A VARIETY SHOW

The Majesty of the Law—nay, in theory at least, the Majesty of England—sat enthroned at Raylesbury. In the big chair in the centre the Honourable Sir Christopher Lance, in his newly powdered wig and his scarlet robes—the "Red Judge" whose splendour solaces (so it is said) even the prisoners with a sense of their own importance. On his right the High Sheriff, splendid also in Deputy-Lieutenant's uniform, but bored, sleepy after a good lunch, and half-stifled by sitting indoors all day in bad air, instead of agreeably killing something under the open vault of Heaven. Beyond him the Chaplain, smooth-faced, ruddy, rather severe, in gown and cassock of silk so fine and stiff as to seem capable of standing up straight on its own account, even if His Reverence chanced not to be inside. At the end, the Under-Sheriff, unobtrusively ready to come to his Chief's assistance. On his Lordship's left—a sad falling off in impressiveness—Arthur in mufti, and on his other side Mr. Williams, the Judge's clerk, a fat man of constant but noiseless activity, ever coming in and going out, fetching nothing from nowhere and taking it back again (at any rate so far as the casual spectator could perceive). Behind, such county magistrates as were attracted by curiosity or by a laudable desire to take a lesson in doing justice. In front, to right and left, and down below, divided from this august company (for even on Marshal and Clerk fell rays of reflected dignity) the world of struggle—the Bar, the solicitors, jury, witnesses, prisoners, spectators, with great policemen planted at intervals like forest-trees amongst the scrub. For mainspring of the whole machine, the Clerk of Assize, a charming and courtly old gentleman, telling everybody what to do and when to do it, polite, though mostly unintelligible, to the prisoners, confidential and consolatory to the jury, profoundly anxious that nothing should ruffle so much as a hair of his lordship's wig.

In the morning they had tried a yokel for stealing a pig. The defence—a guinea's worth—eloquently advanced and ardently pressed—was that the prosecutor had presented the prisoner with the pig in a moment of conviviality. The prosecutor met the suggestion with amazement, the jury with smiles: one might get drunk, but no man was ever so drunk as to give his pig away! Verdict—Guilty. His Lordship passed a light sentence, faintly smiling over the ways of a world which, after nearly fifty years in the law and eighteen on the Bench, still remained to him rather remote and incomprehensible. This case of the pig was a merry case. It lent itself to jokes, and young Bertie Rackstraw's caricature (he solaced briefless days with art) of counsel for the defence arm-in-arm with a gowned and bewigged pig was circulated and much admired. *Pignus amoris*, another wag wrote under it.

Now, in the afternoon, a different atmosphere obtained in court. There were no jokes and no caricatures. People were very quiet. Counsel for the prosecution put his searching questions gravely and gently, almost with pitifulness; counsel for the defence was careful, earnest, anxious. Progress was slow, almost every word of the evidence had to go down in the Judge's red book, to be written down in Sir Christopher's neat precise handwriting. A man was on trial for his life and, as afternoon darkened into evening, the battle drew near its fateful issue.

He was a big, burly, stolid, honest-looking fellow, inarticulate, not able to help himself by his answers or to take proper advantage of the dexterous leads given him by his counsel, who strained his right to lead since life was at stake. In truth, though he was sorry that he had killed her—since his old tenderness for her had revived, and moreover he wished he had killed the other man instead—he could not see that he had done wrong. He knew that the law said he had, and drew therefrom a most formidable conclusion; but he did not feel convicted in his own heart. She had deceived him and, when discovered, had derided him with ugly words. Had he slain her then and there in his rage, the plea of manslaughter might well have prevailed. But he said nothing to her; in grim silence he had taken his way to the town and bought the knife, and waited for two days his opportunity; then cunningly laid in wait where she would come alone, and swiftly, in silence again, killed her. But may not rage—ungovernable rage—last two days and be cunning? Round this the battle raged. He had been cunning, calm, methodical.

It was seven o'clock when the Judge finished his summing-up, and the jury retired. His lordship did not leave the court, but listened to an application relating to a civil cause which was to be heard at the next town. Everybody seemed to turn to this matter with relief; and small noises—coughs and fidgetings—began to be audible again. But Mr. Williams rose and went out noiselessly, soon to return. This time he brought something from somewhere, and held it hidden beneath the Bench.

The jury came back, and the little noises were all hushed.

"How say you—Guilty or Not Guilty?"

"Guilty," the foreman answered. "But we wish to recommend him to mercy, my lord, in view of his great provocation."

The prisoner's eyes turned slowly from the foreman to the Judge. Mr. Williams slid what he had brought—the square of black cloth—into the Marshal's hand, and, under the Bench still, the Marshal gave it to the Judge.

The prisoner only shook his head in answer to the Clerk of Assize's question whether he had any reason why the Court should not pronounce sentence, and in due form sentence followed. The Judge delivered it in low and very gentle tones, with a high compassion. "The Jury's recommendation will receive the fullest consideration, but I may not bid you hope for mercy, save

for that Mercy for which everyone of us equally must pray."

At the end the condemned man made a little bow to the Court, awkward but not without a pathetic dignity. "Thank you, my lord," he said with respectful simplicity. Then he was led downstairs, and the black square travelled back on its hidden way to Mr. Williams' custody. Mr. Williams stowed it in some invisible place, and issued his summons to all and sundry to attend again at half-past ten on the morrow. The Court rose; the work of the day was ended. It remained only for the Marshal to write to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, apprising him that Sentence of Death had been passed and that the Judge's notes would be sent to him without delay. His Lordship, the Sheriff, and the Chaplain passed out to the State carriage, attended by the Javelin-men.

"Do you think he's got any chance, my lord?" asked the High Sheriff, as they drove to the Judge's lodgings.

"Yes, Sir Quintin, an off-chance, I should say. In fact I think I shall help him, as far as I can—that's between ourselves, of course. He didn't seem to me a bad sort of man, but—" He smiled faintly—"very primitive! And the poor wretch of a woman certainly didn't let him down easy."

"I should like to have seen the other man in the dock beside him, my lord," said the Chaplain.

"Oh, well, Chaplain, he wasn't bound to anticipate murder, was he? As it is, he's thought it prudent to get out of the country—at some loss and inconvenience, no doubt; this man's friends were after him. But for that we should have had him here to-day."

"He wouldn't have been popular," the High Sheriff opined, with a shake of his glossy head.

Thus, as the days went by, at Raylesbury and the succeeding Assize towns, drama after drama was unfolded, and varieties of character revealed—knaves guileless and knaves quickwitted; fools without balance or self-restraint; mere animals—or such they seemed—doing animal deeds and confronted with a human standard to which they were not equal and which they regarded with a dull dismay. Incidentally there came to light ways of life and modes of thought astonishing, yet plainly accepted and related as things normal; the old hands on the circuit knew all about them and used their knowledge deftly in cross-examination. Now and then the dock was filled by a figure that seemed strange to it, by a denizen of the same world that Bench and Bar, High Sheriff and Marshal inhabited; in one place there was a solicitor who had been town-clerk and embezzled public moneys; in another a local magistrate stood to plead in the dock side by side with a labourer whom he himself had committed for trial; the labourer was acquitted, and the magistrate sent to prison—with nought to seek thence-forward but oblivion. Freaks of destiny and whirligigs of fortune! Yet these were the exception. The salient revelation was of a great world of people to whom there was nothing strange in finding themselves, their relatives or friends, in that dock, to whom it was an accident that might well happen to anybody, an incident in many a career. But they expected the game to be played; they were keen on that, and bitterly resented any sharp practice by the police; a "fair cop," on the other hand, begat no resentment. Lack of consideration as between man and man, however, stirred ire. One fellow's great grievance was that a zealous officer had arrested him at seven o'clock on a Sunday morning. "Why couldn't 'e let me 'ave my Sunday sleep out?" he demanded. "A bloke's not going to do a bunk at seven on a Sunday morning!" His lordship smilingly assured him that he should have seven days less in prison, but he was not appeased. "Seven of a Sunday, my lordship!" he growled still, in disappearing.

"Well, I shouldn't like it myself," said "my lordship" aside to the Marshal.

His lordship's "asides" added something to the Marshal's instruction and more to his amusement. Sir Christopher was not a reformer or a sociologist, nor even an emotionalist either. He took this Assize Court world as he found it, just as he took West-End drawing-rooms as he found them, at other times of the year. He knew the standards. He was never shocked, and nothing made him angry, except cruelty or a Jack-in-office. In presence of these he was coldly dangerous and deadly. To see him take in hand a policeman whose zeal outran the truth was a lesson in the art of flaying a man's skin off him strip by strip. The asides came often then; the artist would have the pupil note his skill and did not disdain his applause. Though the Marshal's share in the work of the court was of the smallest, his lordship liked him to be there, hearing the cases and qualifying himself for a gossip over them, on an afternoon walk or at dinner in the evening.

As the days went by, a pleasant intimacy between the old man and the young established itself, and grew into a mutual affection, quasi-paternal on the one side, almost filial on the other. A bachelor, without near kindred save an elderly maiden sister, the old Judge found in Arthur something of what a son gives his father—a vicarious and yet personal interest in the years to come—and he found amusement in discovering likenesses between himself and his protégé, or at least in speculating on their existence with a playful humour.

"Men differ in the way they look at their professions or businesses," he said. "Of course everybody's got to live, but, going deeper into it than that, you find one man to whom his profession is, first and foremost, a ladder, and another to whom it's a seat in the theatre—if you follow what I mean. That fellow Norton Ward's of the first class. He's never looking about him; his eyes are always turned upwards, towards an inspiring vision of himself at the top. But you and I like looking about us; we're not in a hurry to be always on the upward move. The scene delights us, even though we've no part in it, or only a small one. That's been true about me, and I think it's true about you, Arthur."

"Oh, I've my ambitions, sir," laughed Arthur. "Fits of ambition, anyhow."

"Fits and starts? That's rather it, I fancy. You probably won't go as far as Norton Ward in a professional way, but you may very likely make just as much mark on life really, besides enjoying it more; I mean in a richer broader way. Purely professional success—and I include politics as well as the law, because they're equally a profession to men like our friend—is rather a narrow thing. The man with more interests—the more human man—spreads himself wider and is more felt really; he gets remembered more too."

"The Idle Man's Apologia! Very ingenious!" said Arthur, smiling.

"No, no, you shan't put that on me. It's perfectly true. The greatest characters—I mean characters, not intellects—are by no means generally in the highest places; because, as I say, to climb up there you have to specialise too much. You have to lop off the branches to make the trunk grow. But I don't see you like that. The Burlington Theatre was hardly in the direct line of ascent, was it?"

"I shan't be quite such a fool as that again, sir."

"Not to that extent, and not perhaps in just that way—no. I don't know exactly how you came to go in for it; indeed you don't quite seem to know yourself, as far as I can gather from what you've said. But I take it that it was to see and find out things—to broaden your life and your world?"

Arthur hesitated. "Yes, I suppose so—complicated by—Well, I was rather excited at the time. I was coming new to a good many things."

Sir Christopher nodded his head, smiling. "You may safely assume that Esther has gossiped to me about you. Well now, take that lady—I don't mean Esther Norton Ward, of course. Men like us appreciate her. Apart from personal relations, she's something in the world to us—a notable part of the show. So we what is called waste a lot of time over her; she occupies us, and other women like her—though there aren't many."

"No, by Jove, there are not!" Arthur assented.

"It's a lucky thing, Arthur, that your good cousin isn't built on the lines of our friend at Raylesbury, isn't it? The world would have been the poorer! By the way, that fellow's going to get off; I had a note from Hurlstone's private secretary this morning." Mr Hurlstone was the Home Secretary. "It's a funny thing, but she kept coming into my mind when I was trying the case."

Arthur's nod confessed to a similar experience.

"We didn't know each other well enough to talk about it then," Sir Christopher observed, smiling. "Fancy if we'd had to try Godfrey Lisle! I hope you're going to stick to the Hilsey folk, Arthur? It's good for a man to have a family anchorage. I haven't got one, and I miss it."

"Yes, rather! I shall go down there in the Christmas vacation. I'm awfully fond of it."

The old man leant forward, warming his hands by the fire. "You'll often find funny parallels like that coming into your head, if you're ever a judge. Good thing too; it gives you a broad view."

"I never shall be a judge," said Arthur, laughing.

"Very likely not, if they go on appointing the best lawyers. Under that system, I should never have been one either."

"I think, on the whole, sir, that it's better fun to be a Marshal."

Certainly it was very good fun—an existence full of change and movement, richly peopled with various personalities. From the Bar they lived rather apart, except for three or four dinner-parties, but they entertained and were entertained by local notables. The High Sheriffs themselves afforded piquant contrasts. Bluff and glossy Sir Quintin, the country gentleman, was one type. Another was the self-made man, newly rich, proud of himself, but very nervous of doing something wrong, and with stories in his mind of judges savagely tenacious of their dignity and free with heavy fines for any breach of etiquette: many an anxious question from him about his lordship's likes and dislikes Arthur had to answer. And once the office was ornamented by the son and heir of a mighty Grandee, who did the thing most splendidly in the matter of equipage and escort—even though his liveries were only the family's "semi-state"—treated his lordship with a deference even beyond the custom, and dazzled Arthur, as they waited for Mr. Justice Lance (who was sometimes late), with easy and unaffected anecdotes of the youth of Princes with whom he had played in childhood—the perfect man of the Great World, with all its graces. Between this High Personage and the man who stole the pig there ranged surely Entire Humanity!

But the most gracious impression—one that made its abiding mark on memory—was more aloof from their work and everyday experience. It was of an old man, tall and thin, white-haired, very courtly, yet very simple and infinitely gentle in manner. He was an old friend of Sir Christopher's, a famous leader of his school of thought in the Church, and now, after long years of labour, was passing the evening of his days in the haven of his Deanery beneath the walls of a stately Cathedral. They spent Sunday in the city, and, after attending service, went to lunch with him. He knew little of their work, and had never known much of the world they moved in. But he knew the poor by his labours among them, and the hearts of men by the strangely keen intuition of holiness. There was no sanctimoniousness, no pursing-up of lips or turning-away of eyes; on the contrary, a very straight dealing with facts and reality. But all things were seen by him in a light which suffused the Universe, in the rays of a far-off yet surely dawning splendour; Sorrow endureth for the night, but Joy cometh in the morning.

As they walked back to the Lodgings, Sir Christopher was silent for awhile. Then he said abruptly: "That's a Saint! I don't know that it's much use for most of us to try to be saints—that's

a matter of vocation, I think—but it does us good to meet one sometimes, doesn't it? All that you and I think—or, speaking for myself perhaps, used to think—so wonderful, so interesting, has for him no importance—hardly any real existence. It's at the most a sort of mist, or mirage, or something of that sort—or a disease of mortal eyes—what you like! Are you in any way a religious man?"

"No, I'm afraid I'm not." He hesitated a moment and went on: "I don't quite see how one can be, you know, sir."

"Not as he is, no—I don't either. And I suppose the world couldn't get on, as a working world, if by a miracle everybody became like him. The world wants its own children too—though no doubt it begets some devilishly extreme specimens, as you and I have seen in the last few weeks. Well, you'll probably make some sort of creed for yourself presently—oh, a very provisional sketchy sort of affair, I daresay, but still a bit better than club codes and that kind of thing. And——" He laid his hand on Arthur's shoulder—"the beginning of it may just as well be this: Earn your money honestly. Such work as you do get or take, put your back into it."

"That after all is just what the Dean has done with his job, isn't it?"

"Why, yes, so it is, though he doesn't do it for money—not even money of his currency. Upon my word, I believe he'd sooner be damned than let you or me be, if he could help it! So I've shown you one more variety of human nature, Arthur."

"It's at least as well worth seeing as any of the rest."

"Fit it in at leisure with your other specimens," Sir Christopher recommended.

It did not seem altogether easy to follow this advice—even after reflection.

But there had been other specimens, also not too easy to fit in with one another or with any neat and compact scheme of society, vindicating to complete satisfaction the ways of God to men and of men to one another. No symmetrical pattern emerged. Wherever he looked, life met his enquiring eyes with a baffling but stimulating smile.

CHAPTER XXXI

START AND FINISH

Whenever he was at home at the time of the Assizes Lord Swarleigh made a point of inviting the Judge to dinner. He was Lord-Lieutenant of the County, and he considered the attention due from the Military to the Civil Representative of the Crown. The occasion was treated as one of ceremony, and though Sir Christopher, in mercy to the horses and his own patience, refused to drive the six hilly miles which lay between the town and Higham Swarleigh Park in the state carriage, and hired a car, he was in court dress; very refined and aristocratic he looked.

"It's an enormous house, but distinctly ugly," he told the Marshal as they drove along. "But they've got a lot of fine things, and they're nice people. You'll enjoy yourself, I think."

Presently the great house came dimly into view, its outline picked out by the lights in the windows. It might be ugly; it was certainly huge; it seemed to squat on the country-side like a mighty toad. It had a tremendous air of solidity, of permanence, of having been there from the beginning of time, and of meaning to stay till the end, of being part of the eternal order of things—rather like a secular cathedral, with powdered footmen for beadles, and a groom of the chambers for chief verger.

With courtly punctilio the Lord-Lieutenant received his guest on the threshold, and himself led him to the State drawing-room, where her Ladyship was waiting. The Marshal followed behind, rather nervous, not knowing exactly what his part might be in these dignified proceedings. The Lord-Lieutenant was in full fig too, and several of the men in uniform; the ladies were very sumptuous; the Bishop of the diocese in his violet coat was a good touch in the picture. Behind the hostess, as she received them, hung a full-length portrait of His Majesty King George the Fourth of happy memory, arrayed in the robes of the Garter; His Majesty too was decorative, though in a more florid manner than the Bishop.

Lord Swarleigh was not at all like his house, and anything military about him was purely *ex officio*. He was a short thin man with a grey beard, an antiquarian and something of an historian. When he heard Arthur's name, he asked what family of Lisles he belonged to, and when Arthur (with accursed pride in his heart) answered "The Lisles of Hilsey," he nodded his head with intelligence and satisfaction. Lady Swarleigh was not at all alarming either. She was a plump middle-aged woman who had been pretty and wore her clothes with an air, but her manner had a natural kindness and simplicity which reminded Arthur of Esther Norton Ward's. She handed him over to a pretty gay girl who stood beside her. "Fanny, you look after Mr. Lisle," she commanded. "He's to take you in, I think, but Alfred'll tell you about that." Lady Fanny took possession of him in such a friendly fashion that Arthur began to enjoy himself immediately.

He saw a tall handsome young fellow moving about the room from man to man and briefly whispering to each; his manner was calm and indolent, and his demeanour rather haughty; he smiled condescendingly over something that the Bishop whispered back to him with a hearty

chuckle.

"Alfred Daynton's wonderful!" said Lady Fanny. "He's papa's secretary, you know, though he really does all mamma's work. He can send twenty couples in without a list! He never mixes them up, and always knows the right order."

The great Alfred came up. "You're all right," he said briefly to Lady Fanny and Arthur, and gave a reassuring nod to Lady Swarleigh herself. Then he looked at his watch, and from it, expectantly, towards the doors. On the instant they opened; dinner was ready. Alfred again nodded his head just perceptibly and put his watch back in his pocket. He turned to Lady Fanny. "You're at the pink table—on the far side." He smiled dreamily as he added, "In the draught, you know."

"Bother! You always put me there!"

"*Seniores priores*—and little girls last! Sorry for you, Mr. Lisle, but you see you're on duty—and I've got to sit there myself, moreover. And you'll have to talk to me, because I haven't got a woman. I'm taking in the Chief Constable—jolly, isn't it?"

However, at the pink table—where the host presided, flanked by the High Sheriff's wife and the Bishop's wife—the young folks in the draught got on very well, in spite of it; and all their wants were most sedulously supplied.

"The thing in this house is to sit near Alfred," Lady Fanny observed. "Papa and mamma may get nothing, but you're all right by Alfred!"

"That's a good 'un!" chuckled the Chief Constable, a stout old bachelor Major of ruddy aspect.

"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn," said Alfred, who appeared to be fond of proverbial expressions.

"You see, he engages and dismisses all the men," Lady Fanny explained.

It struck Arthur that Lady Fanny and Alfred were in truth remarkably good friends, and he was not wrong. In the future among his own best friends he counted Mr. and Lady Fanny Daynton, and Mr. Daynton turned his remarkable powers of organisation to the service of the public. But to-night Lady Fanny dutifully devoted herself to the Marshal, and proved an intelligent as well as a gay companion. Seeing his interest in his surroundings, she told him about the pictures on the walls, the old silver ornaments on the table, the armorial devices on the silver plates. "You see, papa has drummed all the family history into us," she said, in laughing apology for her little display of learning. "He says people don't deserve to have old things if they don't take an interest in them."

"I'm afraid I should take only too much, if they were mine. They appeal to me awfully." He added, smiling in a burst of candour, with a little wave of his hands: "So does all this!"

She considered what he said for a moment with a pretty gravity, evidently understanding his words and gesture to refer to the surroundings at large, the pomp and circumstance in which it was her lot to live, to which he came as a stranger and on which he looked with unaccustomed eyes; she liked his frank admission that it was unfamiliar.

"I don't think it hurts," she said at last, "if you don't take credit to yourself for it. You know what I mean? If you don't think it makes you yourself different from other people."

"But is that easy?" he asked in curiosity. "Isn't there a subtle influence?"

"You're asking rather hard questions, Mr. Lisle!"

"I suppose I am, but I was thinking mainly of myself. I associate other people with their surroundings and possessions so much that I believe I should do the same with myself. If I had a beautiful house, I should think myself beautiful!"

"If you had this house, then, would you think yourself a hideous giant?" she asked, laughing. "But how do you mean about other people?"

"Well, I've got cousins who live in a fine old house—oh, not a twentieth the size of this!—and I'm sure I like them better because they've got a beautiful house. And the first time I saw a very great friend she was in a very smart carriage; and I'm sure she made a greater impression on me because of the carriage. And I'm afraid that's being a snob, isn't it?"

She laughed again. "Well, don't think of us in connection with our house, or you'll think of us as snails with shells too large for them on their backs! No, I don't think you're a snob, but I think you must beware of an æsthetic temperament. It makes people rather soft sometimes, doesn't it?"

Before he had time to answer, Alfred cut in firmly: "Now it's my turn, Lady Fanny!" He pointed with his thumb to the Chief Constable's averted shoulder, and dropped his voice to a whisper; "I've engineered him on to the Chaplain's wife!" Arthur could not flatter himself that Lady Fanny showed any annoyance at the interruption.

On the other side sat the Under-Sheriff—the supply of ladies had quite given out—but the good man was not conversational, and Arthur was left at leisure to look about him. His eye fell on the small, thin, refined little host, sitting back in his big arm-chair with an air of patient resignation, while two large women—the Bishop's wife and the High Sheriff's wife—talked to one another volubly across him. Perhaps even being the local magnate was not all beer and skittles! If one great man had admired "sustained stateliness of living" another had seen in it a compatibility with every misfortune save one—poverty. A compatibility obviously with boredom, and probably with a great deal of it for a man like Lord Swarleigh! A continuous annual round of it, always

between somebody's wives, wives of eminent persons and not generally in their first youth—nor, on the other hand, interested in the family history, nor in armorial bearings. Why even he himself was better off; if he had the Under-Sheriff on one side, he had youth and beauty on the other. Arthur found himself being quite sorry for Lord Swarleigh, in spite of Higham Swarleigh Park, the old silver, and George the Fourth in the robes of the Garter. He had a vision of Godfrey Lisle at one of Bernadette's fashionable parties. Godfrey had got out of it all—at a price. Poor Lord Swarleigh would never get out of it—till Death authoritatively relieved him of his duties.

After dinner Lady Swarleigh signalled him, and made him come and talk to her.

"We're always so glad when your Judge comes our circuit," she said. "He's a friend, you see, and that makes our Assize dinner pleasanter. Though I always like it; lawyers tell such good stories. Sir Christopher's very fond of you, isn't he? Oh, yes, he's been talking a lot about you at dinner. And he tells me you know Esther Norton Ward. Her mother was at school with me, and I knew her when she was so high! You must come and see us in London in the summer, won't you? I wish the Judge and you could come out to dinner again—just quietly, without all these people—but he tells me you're moving on directly; so we must wait for London. Now don't forget!"

Here was a woman to like, Arthur made up his mind instantly; a regular good sort of woman she seemed to him, a woman of the order of Marie Sarradet; ripened by life, marriage, and motherhood, and, besides, amplified as it were by a situation and surroundings which gave greater scope to her powers and broader effect to her actions—yet in essence the same kind of woman, straightforward, friendly, reliable.

"I've only one girl left at home," she went on, "and I daresay I shan't keep her long, but the married ones are always running in and out, and the boys too, and their boy and girl friends. So you'll find lots of young people, and lots of racketing going on. They often get up private theatricals and inflict them on the patients at our hospital—my husband is President of St. Benedict's, you know—and you ought to be able to help us—with your experience!"

Arthur smiled and blushed. Sir Christopher had been talking, it seemed; but apparently the talk had not done him any harm in Lady Swarleigh's estimation.

"We shall be up after Easter. Don't forget!" she commanded again, rising to meet the Judge as he came to take leave of her.

With renewed ceremony, escorted by the Lord-Lieutenant, with the High Sheriff, the Chaplain, the Under-Sheriff—last, but certainly not least, Alfred—hovering in attendance, his lordship and his satellite returned to their motor-car, the satellite at least having thoroughly enjoyed his evening.

"What awfully jolly people they are!" he exclaimed, thinking, plainly, of the ladies of the family; for the adjective was not appropriate to Lord Swarleigh himself.

Sir Christopher nodded, smiling in amusement at Arthur's enthusiasm, but very well pleased with it, and more pleased with the hostess's whispered word of praise for his young friend as she bade him good night.

"I got a piece of news to-night which I'm ashamed to say I find myself considering bad," he said. "I thought I wouldn't tell you before dinner, for fear that you'd think it bad too, and so have your evening spoilt to some extent. Horace Derwent writes that he's quite well again and would like to join me for the rest of the circuit. And I can't very well refuse to have him; he's been with me so often; and, what's more, this'll be the last time. I'm going to retire at Christmas."

"Retire! Why, you're not feeling out of sorts, are you, sir? You seem wonderfully fit."

"I am. Wonderfully fit—to retire! I'm turned seventy and I'm tired. And I'm not as quick as I was. When I sit in the Divisional Court with a quick fellow—like Naresby, for instance, a lad of forty-nine or so—I find it hard to keep up. He's got hold of the point while I'm still putting on my spectacles! It isn't always the point really, but that's neither here nor there. So I'm going. They'll give me my Right Honourable, I suppose, and I shall vanish becomingly."

"I'm awfully sorry. I wanted to have a case before you some day! Now I shan't. But, I say, they ought to make you a peer. You're about the—well, the best-known judge on the Bench."

Sir Christopher shook his head. "That's my rings, not me," he said, smiling. "No, what's the use of a peerage to me, even if it was offered? I'm not fit to sit in the Lords—not enough of a lawyer—and I've no son. If you were my son in the flesh, my dear boy, as I've rather come to think of you in the spirit, these last weeks, I might ask for one for your sake! But I've got only one thing left to do now—and that's a thing a peerage can't help about."

Arthur was deeply touched, but found nothing to say.

"It's a funny thing to come to the end of it all," the old man mused. "And to look back to the time when I was where you are, and to remember what I expected—though, by the way, that's hard to remember exactly! A lot of work, a lot of nonsense! And to see what's become of the other fellows too—who's sunk, and who's swum! Some of the favourites have won, but a lot of outsiders! I was an outsider myself; they used to tell me I should marry a rich wife and chuck it. But I've never married a wife at all, and I stuck to it. And the women too!"

Arthur knew that gossip, floating down the years, credited Sir Christopher with adventures of the heart. But the old man now shook his head gently and smiled rather ruefully. "Very hard to get that back! It all seems somehow faded—the colour gone out."

He lapsed into silence till they approached the end of their drive. Then he roused himself from

his reverie to say, "So old Horace must come and see the end of me, and you and I must say good-bye. Our jaunt's been very pleasant to me. I think it has to you, hasn't it, Arthur?"

"It's been more than pleasant, sir. It's been somehow—I don't quite know what to call it—broadening, perhaps. I've spread out—didn't you call it that the other day?"

"Yes. Go on doing that. It enriches your life, though it mayn't fill your pocket. Make acquaintances—friends in different sets. Know all sorts of people. Go and see places. No reason to give up the theatre even! Fill your store-house against the time when you have to live on memory."

They reached the lodgings and went in together. Arthur saw his Judge comfortably settled by the fire and supplied with his tumbler of weak brandy and hot water before he noticed a telegram, addressed to himself, lying on the table. He opened and read it, and then came to Sir Christopher and put it into his hands. "I think I should have had to ask you to let me go anyhow—apart from Mr. Derwent."

Sir Christopher read: "Heavy brief come in from Wills and Mayne coming on soon please return early as possible—Henry."

"Hum! That sounds like business. Who are Wills and Mayne?"

"I haven't an idea. They gave me that County Court case I told you about. But I don't in the least know why they come to me."

"That's part of the fun of the dear old game. You can never tell! I got a big case once by going to the races. Found a fellow there who'd backed a winner and got very drunk. He'd lost his hat and his scarf-pin before I arrived on the scene, but I managed to save his watch, put him inside my hansom, and brought him home. To show his gratitude, he made his lawyers put me in a case he had. First and last, it was worth four or five hundred guineas to me. I believe I'd had a good deal of champagne too, which probably made me very valiant! Well, you must go at once, as early as you can to-morrow morning, and send a wire ahead—no, Williams can telephone—to say you're coming. You mustn't take any risks over this. It ought to be a real start for you." He stretched out his hands before the fire. "Your start chimes in with my finish!" He looked up at Arthur with a sly smile. "How are the nerves going to be, if you run up against Brother Pretyman in the course of this great case of yours?"

"I wish he was retiring, instead of you!" laughed Arthur.

"If you really know your case, he can't hurt you. You may flounder a bit, but if you really know it you'll get it out at last."

"I'm all right when once I get excited," said Arthur, remembering Mr. Tiddes.

"Oh, you'll be all right! Now go to bed. It's late, and you must be stirring early to-morrow. I'll say good-bye now—I'm not good at early hours."

"I'm awfully sorry it's over, and I don't know how to thank you."

"Never mind that. You think of your brief. Be off with you! I'll stay here a little while, and meditate over my past sins." He held out his hand and Arthur took it. They exchanged a long clasp. "The road's before you, Arthur. God bless you!"

The old man sat on alone by the fire, but he did not think of his bygone sins nor even of his bygone triumphs and pleasures. He thought of the young man who had just left him—his son in the spirit, as he had called him in a real affection. He was planning now a great pleasure for himself. He was not a rich man, for he had both spent and given freely, but he would have his pension for life, quite enough for his own wants, and after providing for the maiden sister, and for all other claims on him, he would have a sum of eight or ten thousand pounds free to dispose of. At his death, or on Arthur's marriage—whichever first happened—Arthur should have it. Meanwhile the intention should be his own pleasant secret. He would say nothing about it, and he was sure that Arthur had no idea of anything of the sort in his head. Let the boy work now—with the spur of necessity pricking his flank! "If I gave it him now, the rascal would take another theatre, confound him!" said Sir Christopher to himself with much amusement—and no small insight into his young friend's character.

CHAPTER XXXII

WISDOM CONFOUNDED

"Mr. Tracy Darton was in it, sir. He advised, and drew the pleadings. But he got silk the same time as we did" (Henry meant, as Mr. Norton Ward did), "and now they've taken you in." Henry's tone was one of admiring surprise. "And Sir Humphrey Fynes is to lead Mr. Darton—they're sparing nothing! I gather there's a good deal of feeling in the case. I've fixed a conference for you, sir, at four-fifteen. There's one or two points of evidence they want to consult you about."

Thus Henry to Arthur—with the "heavy brief" between them on the table. Perhaps Henry's surprise and enthusiasm had run away with him a little; or perhaps he had wanted to make quite sure of lassoing Arthur back. At any rate, had the brief been Norton Ward's, he would hardly

have called it "heavy"—satisfactory and, indeed, imposing as the fee appeared in Arthur's eyes. Nor was the case what would generally be known as a "heavy" one; no great commercial transaction was involved, no half-a-million or so of money depended on it. None the less, it already displayed a fair bulk of papers—a voluminous correspondence—and possessed, as Arthur was soon to discover, great potentialities of further growth. A very grain of mustard seed for that! It was destined, as luck would have it (the lawyers' luck, not the clients'), to a notable career; it engaged the attention of no less than ten of His Majesty's Judges. It had already been before Pretyman, J., in chambers. Naresby, J., was to try it (if a glance into the future be allowable). The Court of Appeal was to send it back for a new trial. The Lord Chief Justice was to take it to himself. Again the Court of Appeal was to figure, disagreeing with the judgment pronounced by the Lord Chief Justice on the findings of the jury. And, at last, four noble and learned Lords were to upset the Court of Appeal, and restore the judgment of the Lord Chief Justice—a decision which, at all events, was final, though Arthur, whose feelings were by that time deeply engaged, never pretended to consider it right. And then, when the case was disposed of for good and all, no longer *sub judicibus* (the plural is obviously demanded), the newspapers took a turn at it with those ironical comments with which their ignorance is rashly prone to assail the mysteries of the Law.

It—that is, the case of *Crewdson v. The Great Southern Railway Company*—was about a dog, consigned according to the plaintiff's—which was Arthur's—contention (the real movements of the animal were wrapped in doubt from the outset) by a certain Startin—who was at that date butler to the plaintiff, but under notice to leave, and who did a few days later vanish into space—to his mistress, Miss Crewdson, an elderly lady of considerable means and of indomitable temper—from Tenterden in Sussex to its owner at Harrogate, where she was taking the waters. Though a very small dog, it was a very precious one, both from a sentimental and from a pecuniary point of view. So it ought to have been, considering the questions of law and fact which it raised! For in reply to Miss Crewdson's simple, but determined and reiterated, demand for her dog or her damages, the Company made answer, first, that they had never received the dog at Tenterden, secondly that they had duly delivered the dog at Harrogate, and lastly—but it was a "lastly" pregnant with endless argument—that they had done all they were bound to do in regard to the dog, whatever had in truth happened or not happened to the animal. What actually had, nobody ever knew for certain. A dog—some dog—got to Harrogate in the end. The Company said this was Miss Crewdson's dog, if they had ever carried a dog of hers at all; Miss Crewdson indignantly repudiated it. And there, in the end, the question of fact rested—for ever unsolved. The House of Lords—though the Lord Chancellor, basing himself on a comparison of photographs, did indulge in an *obiter dictum* that the Harrogate dog, if it were not the Tenterden dog, was as like as two peas to it ("Of course it was—both Pekinese! But it wasn't our dog," Arthur muttered indignantly)—found it unnecessary to decide this question, in view of the fact that, Startin having disappeared into space, there was no sufficient evidence to justify a jury in finding that the Company had ever received any dog of Miss Crewdson's. It was this little point of the eternally doubtful identity of the Harrogate dog which proved such a godsend to the wits of the Press; they suggested that the Highest Tribunal in the Land might have taken its courage in both hands and given, at all events for what it was worth, its opinion about the Harrogate dog. Was he Hsien-Feng, or wasn't he? But no. The House of Lords said it was unnecessary to decide that. It was certainly extremely difficult, and had given two juries an immensity of trouble.

All these remarkable developments, all these delightful ramifications, now lay within the ambit of the red tape which Arthur, left alone, feverishly untied. He had to be at it; he could not wait. Not only was there the conference at four-fifteen, but he was all of an itch to know what he was in for and what he might hope for, divided between a craven fear of difficulty above his powers and a soaring hope of opportunity beyond his dreams.

After three hours' absorbed work he was still on the mere fringe of the case, still in the early stages of that voluminous correspondence, when Miss Crewdson was tolerably, and the Company obsequiously, polite—and no dog at all was forthcoming, to correspond to the dog alleged to have been consigned from Tenterden. A dog was being hunted for all over two railway systems; likely dogs had been sighted at Guildford, at Peterborough, and at York. The letters stiffened with the arrival of the Harrogate dog—ten days after the proper date for the arrival of the dog from Tenterden. "Not my dog," wrote Miss Crewdson positively, and added an intimation that future correspondence should be addressed to her solicitors. Messrs. Wills and Mayne took up the pen; in their hands and in those of the Company's solicitors the letters assumed a courteous but irrevocably hostile tone. Meanwhile the unfortunate Harrogate dog was boarded out at a veterinary surgeon's—his charges to abide the result of the action; that doubt as to his identity would survive even the result of the action was not then foreseen.

Arthur broke off for lunch with a tremendous sense of interest, of zest, and of luck—above all, of luck. He had not been called two years yet; he had no influential backing; such a little while ago work had seemed so remote, in hours of depression, indeed, so utterly out of the question. Then the tiny glimmer of Mr. Tiddes, now the glowing rays of *Crewdson v. The Great Southern Railway Company*! It was not the moment, even if he had been the man, for a measured sobriety of anticipation; it was one of those rare and rich hours of youth when everything seems possible and no man's lot is to be envied.

And he owed it to Wills and Mayne—unaccountably and mysteriously still! The picture of old Mr. Mayne, with his winking eye, rose before his mind. A strange incarnation of Fortune! A very whimsical shape for a man's Chance to present itself in! He gave up the mystery of how Mr. Mayne had ever heard of him originally, but he hugged to his heart the thought that he must

have conducted the Tiddes case with unexampled brilliancy. Only thus could he account for Mr. Mayne's persistent loyalty.

So, after lunch, back to the dog—the Harrogate dog, that Tichborne Claimant of a Pekinese dog!

Four o'clock struck. With a sudden return of fear, with a desperate resolve to seem calm and not over-eager, Arthur prepared to face Mr. Mayne. He wished to look as if cases like *Crewdson v. The Great Southern Railway Company* were an everyday occurrence.

Punctually at four-fifteen, a knock at the outer door—and footsteps! Henry threw open the door of his room. "Mr. Thomas Mayne to see you, sir." Henry's manner was very important.

"Oh, show him in, please," said Arthur. It struck him, with a sudden pang, that the bareness of his table was glaringly horrible. Not even, as it chanced, any of Norton Ward's briefs which, turned face-downwards, might have dressed it to some degree of decency!

"This way, sir, please," said Henry, with his head over his shoulder.

Timidly, rather apologetically, with a shy yet triumphant smile on his melancholy face, Mr. Claud Beverley entered.

Instantaneously, at the mere sight of him, before Henry had finished shutting the door, the truth flashed into Arthur's mind, amazing yet supremely obvious; and his mind, thus illuminated, perceived the meaning of things hitherto strange and unaccountable—of Wills and Mayne's interest and loyalty, of old Mr. Mayne's presence at the first night, of Mr. Claud Beverley's promise to do him a good turn, no less than of that budding author's bitter references to "the office," which so hampered and confined the flight of his genius. He had been so fierce, too, when Ayesha Layard threatened to betray his identity! Arthur fell back into the chair from which he had just risen to receive his visitor, and burst into a fit of laughter—at Mr. Beverley, at himself, at the way of the world and the twists of fortune. "By Jove, it's you!" he spluttered out, in mirthful enjoyment of the revelation.

Tom Mayne—such was he henceforth to be to Arthur, however the world might best know him—advanced to the table and—timidly still—sat down by it. "I swore to get it for you—and I have! Tracy Darton's taking silk gave me the chance. I had an awful job, though; the governor thought you hadn't enough experience, and he was rather upset about your being away—you remember that time? But I stuck to him, and I brought him round. I managed it!"

In mirth and wonder Arthur forgot to pay his thanks. "But why the deuce didn't you tell me, old man? Why have you been playing this little game on me all this while?"

"Oh, well, I—I didn't know whether I could bring it off." His timidity was giving way to gratification, as he saw what a success his coup had with Arthur. "Besides I thought it was rather—well, rather interesting and dramatic."

"Oh, it is—most uncommonly—both interesting and dramatic," chuckled Arthur. "If you knew how I've wondered who in the devil's name Wills and Mayne were!"

"Yes, that's just what I thought you'd be doing. That was the fun of it!"

"And it turns out to be you! And I wondered why your governor was at the first night!"

"I thought you might see him. I was rather afraid that might give it away. But he insisted on coming."

"Give it away! Lord, no! It no more entered my head than——!" A simile failed him. "Did nobody know who you were? Not Joe? Not the Sarradets?"

"None of them—except Ayesha Layard. She knew who I was, because we once did a case for her."

Arthur was gazing at him now in an amusement which had grown calmer but was still intense.

"Well, I was an ass!" he said softly. Then he remembered what he ought to have done at first. "I say, I'm most tremendously obliged to you, old fellow."

"Well, you came to the rescue. We were absolutely stuck up for the rest of the money—couldn't go on without it, and didn't know where to get it. Then you planked it down—and I tell you I felt it! You gave me my chance, and I made up my mind to give you one if I could. It's only your being at the Bar that made it possible—and my being in the office, of course."

"But it wasn't much of a chance I gave you, unfortunately."

"You mean because it was a failure? Oh, that makes no difference. I was on the wrong tack. I say, Lisle, my new play's fixed. We're rehearsing now. The Twentieth Society's going to do it on Sunday week, and, if it's a go, they're going to give me a week at Manchester. If that's all right, I ought to get a London run, oughtn't I?" His voice was very eager and excited. "If I do, and if it's a success"—(How the "Ifs" accumulated!)—"I shall chuck the office!"

It was his old climax, his old hope, aspiration, vision. Arthur heard it again, had heard him working up to it through that procession of "Ifs," with a mixture of pity and amusement. Would the new play do the trick, would "real life" serve him better than the humours of farce? Would that "success" ever come, or would all Tom Mayne's life be a series of vain efforts to chuck an office ultimately unchuckable, a long and futile striving to end his double personality, and to be nobody but Claud Beverley? Full of sympathy, Arthur wondered.

"It's bound to be a success, old chap. Here, have a cigarette, and tell me something about it."

Eagerly responding to the invitation, the author plunged into an animated sketch of his plot, a

vivid picture of the subtleties of his heroine's character and the dour influence of her environment: the drama was realistic, be it remembered. Arthur listened, nodding here and there, now murmuring "Good!" now "By Jove!" now opening his eyes wide, now smiling. "Oh, jolly good!" he exclaimed over the situation at the end of the First Act.

Meanwhile *Crewdson v. The Great Southern Railway Company* lay on the table between them, unheeded and forgotten. It too, had it been animate, might have mused on the twists of Fortune. This afternoon at least it might have expected to hold the pride of place undisputed in Arthur Lisle's chambers!

But not until the scenario of the drama had been sketched out to the very end, not until Arthur's murmurs of applause died away, did Claud Beverley turn again into Tom Mayne. And the transformation was woefully incomplete; for it was with a sad falling-off in interest, indeed in a tone of deep disgust, that he said, "Well, I suppose we must get back to that beastly case!"

Arthur laughed again. What a way to talk of his precious brief, pregnant with all those wonderful possibilities! What an epithet for the barque that carried Cæsar and his fortunes! But his laugh had sympathy and understanding in it. Across the narrow table sat another Cæsar—and there was a barque that carried his fortunes, and was to set sail within a short space on a stormy and dangerous voyage, over a sea beset with shoals.

"Well, anyhow, here's jolly good luck to *Jephthah's Daughter*!" he said. Such was the title of Mr. Claud Beverley's play of real life.

But when they did at last get back to the neglected case, and Tom Mayne elbowed out Claud Beverley, a very good head Tom showed himself to have, however melancholy again its facial aspect. They wrestled with their points of evidence for an hour, Arthur sending to borrow Norton Ward's 'Taylor,' and at the end Tom Mayne remarked grimly, "That's a double conference, I think!"

"Some of it really belongs to *Jephthah's Daughter*," said Arthur with a laugh.

"We may as well get something out of her, anyhow!"—and Tom Mayne absolutely laughed.

Making an appointment to meet and dine, accepting an invitation to come and see *Jephthah's Daughter*, full of thanks, friendliness, and sympathetic hopes for the friend who had done him such a good turn, inspired with the thought of the work and the fight which lay before him—in fact, in a state of gleeful excitement and goodwill towards the world at large, Arthur accompanied his friend to the door and took leave of him—indeed of both of him; gratitude to Tom Mayne, hopes for Claud Beverley, were inextricably blended.

And it so fell out—what, indeed, was not capable of happening to-day?—that, as his friend walked down the stairs with a last wave of his arm, Mr. Norton Ward, K.C., walked up them, on his return from a consultation with Sir Robert Sharpe.

"Who's that?" he asked carelessly, as he went into chambers, followed by Arthur, and they reached the place—half room, half hall—which Henry and the boy (the Junior Clerk was his own title for himself) inhabited.

"Only one of my clients," said Arthur, with assumed grandeur, but unable to resist grinning broadly.

"One won't be able to get up one's own stairs for the crowd, if you go on like this," observed Norton Ward. "Oh, look here, Henry! I met Mr. Worthing—of the Great Southern office, you know—over at Sir Robert's. There's a case coming in from them to-night, and they want a consultation at half-past five to-morrow. Just book it, will you?"

He turned to go into his own room.

But Arthur had lingered—and listened. "A case from the Great Southern? Do you know what it's about?"

Norton Ward smiled—rather apologetically. He liked it to be considered that he was in only really "heavy" cases now. "Well, it's something about a dog, I believe, Arthur." He added, "An uncommonly valuable dog, I'm told, though."

A valuable dog indeed—for one person in that room, anyhow!

"A dog!" cried Arthur. "Why, that's my case! I'm in it!"

Norton Ward grinned; Arthur grinned; but most broadly of all grinned Henry. Clerk's fees from both sides for Henry, to say nothing of the dramatic interest of civil war, of domestic struggle!

"Do you mean you're for the plaintiff? How in thunder did you get hold of it?"

"That's my little secret," Arthur retorted triumphantly. It was not necessary to tell all the world the train of events which led up to his brief in *Crewdson v. The Great Southern Railway Company*.

"Well, I congratulate you, old chap," said Norton Ward heartily. Then he grinned again. "Come and dine to-morrow, and we'll try to settle it."

"Settle it be——! Not much!" said Arthur. "But I'll dine all right."

Norton Ward went off into his room, laughing.

That was an awful idea—settling! Even though advanced in jest, it had given him a little shock. But he felt pretty safe. He had read Miss Crewdson's letters; she was most emphatically not a

settling woman! Her dog, her whole dog, and nothing but her dog, was what Miss Crewdson wanted.

Arthur sat down before his fire and lit his pipe. He abandoned himself to a gratified contemplation of the turn in his fortunes. A great moment when a young man sees his chosen profession actually opening before him, when dreams and hopes crystallize into reality, when he plucks the first fruit from branches which a little while ago seemed so far out of reach! This moment it was now Arthur's to enjoy. And there was more. For he was not only exulting; he was smiling in a sly triumph. What young man does not smile in his sleeve when the Wisdom of the Elders is confounded? And what good-natured Elder will not smile with him—and even clap his hands?

"It's my own fault if that thousand pounds I put in the farce doesn't turn out the best investment of my life!" thought Arthur.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A NEW VISION

It was not given to Arthur again to hear his mother's voice or to see her alive. A few days after the first round of the protracted battle over the great case had ended in his favour, just before the close of the legal term, news reached him of her death. She had been suffering from a chill and had taken to her bed, but no immediate danger was anticipated. She had read with keen pleasure Arthur's letters, full now of a new zest for his work and a new confidence. She breathed her gentle *Nunc Dimittis*; her daughter's future was happily arranged, her son's now opened before him. In simple and ardent faith her eyes turned to another world. As though in answer to an appeal instinctively issuing from her own soul, the end came very quickly. The tired heart could bear no added strain. After making her comfortable for the night, Anna had gone downstairs to eat her own supper; when she came up again, all was over. There was no sign of movement, no look of shock or pain; her eyes were closed. It seemed that sleeping she had fallen asleep, and her peaceful spirit found in an instant the eternal peace of its faithful aspiration.

Here was no place for the bitterness of grief. Death brought a quickened sense of unity and love, and the lost mother joined her children's hands in a renewal of childhood's affection and of sweet old memories. "Peace I leave with you," Anna whispered to Arthur as they stood beside the grave, and he felt that she divined truly the legacy which their mother would have chosen, before all others, to bequeath to them.

It was arranged that Anna should go and stay with Ronald Slingsby's people until the time came for her wedding; it was to take place in about three months. The old familiar home was to be broken up. They spent two or three busy days together, sorting out furniture, settling what was to be sold and what either of them would like to keep; regretfully deciding that this or that relic of old days was "rubbish" and must be destroyed, redolent though it was with memories. Many a sigh, many a laugh, the old things drew from them; forgotten pass-words of childish intimacy came back to mind; ancient squabbles were recalled with fond amusement. They lived the old days over again together. The consciousness that the old days were finally over, that their paths in life lay henceforth far apart, gave added tenderness to recollection, making this good-bye to the old house and the old things a good-bye to the old days also—even in some sense a good-bye to one another.

So it had to be, and so in truth it was best. They were not made to live together. Differences now submerged beneath the waves of a common love and a common emotion would rise to the surface again, a menace to their love and peace. Both knew it—was there not the memory of Arthur's former visit to remind them?—and acquiesced in the separation which their lots in life imposed. Yet with sadness. When the actual moment came for leaving the old house and one another, Anna threw herself into her brother's arms, sobbing. "We mustn't quite forget one another, Arthur!"

"Please God, never, my dear," he answered gravely. "We've shared too much together for that."

"You'll come to the wedding?" Her voice fell to a whisper. "You'll be friends with Ronald?"

"Yes, yes, indeed I will. Why not?"

"He's not narrow or uncharitable really. It's only that his standards are so high," she pleaded.

"I know—and I hope mine'll get a little higher. Anyhow we shall be jolly good friends, you'll see. Come, this isn't really good-bye, Anna!"

She kissed him tenderly, whispering, "I shall pray for you always, Arthur," and so turned from him to Ronald, who was to escort her on her journey to his mother's house at Worcester. Arthur left Malvern later in the same day, to spend his Christmas at Hilsey.

He went from his old home to a new one; the manner of his welcome assured him of that plainly. They were all—even Godfrey—at the station to meet him. Their greetings, a little subdued in deference to his sorrow, seemed full of gladness, even of pride, that they should be there to soothe and soften it, that he should have Hilsey to turn to, now that the links with his old life were broken. When they got him to the house, they shewed him, with exulting satisfaction, a new feature, a surprise which Judith had conceived and Godfrey gladly agreed in carrying out—a

room, next to his old bedroom, fitted up as a "den" for his exclusive use, artfully supplied with all male appurtenances and comforts, a place where he could be his own master, a visible sign that he was no more a guest but a member of the household.

"Well, this is something like!" said Arthur, squeezing Margaret's little hand in his and looking at Judith's eyes, which shone with pleasure over the pretty surprise she had contrived for him.

"You needn't be bothered with any of us more than you want now," she told him.

"We're never to come in unless you invite us," Margaret gravely assured him.

"A man's lost without his own room," Godfrey remarked; and without doubt he spoke his true feelings.

"I take possession—and I'm not sure I shall let any of you in!" Arthur declared gaily.

"Oh, me, sometimes?" implored Margaret.

"Well, you, sometimes—and perhaps one guinea-pig occasionally!" he promised.

Only a few days before—while Arthur was still at Malvern—Godfrey's case had been heard and had, of course, gone through unopposed. He had performed his part in it with that reserve of quiet dignity which was his in face of things inevitable. Save for a formality—in this instance it was no more—he and Bernadette were quit of one another. The new state of things was definitely established, the family reconstituted on a fresh basis. Little Margaret was now its centre, her happiness and welfare its first preoccupation, the mainspring of its life. No longer harassed by the sense of failure, or afraid of a criticism none the less galling for being conveyed in merry glances, Godfrey dared to respond openly to his little girl's appeal for love. When the child, tutored by Judith's skilful encouragement, made bold to storm the defences of his study and beg his company, she met with a welcome shy still but cordial, with a quiet affection which suited her own youthful gravity. They would wander off together, or busy themselves over Margaret's animals, neither of them saying much—and what little they did say impersonal and matter-of-fact—yet obviously content in their comradeship, liking to be left to it, creating gradually, as the days went by, a little tranquil world of their own, free from incursions and alarms, safe from unexpected calls on them, from having to follow other people's changing moods and adapt themselves to other people's fitful emotions. The little maid grave beyond her years—the timid man shrinking back from the exactions of life—they seemed curiously near of an age together, strangely alike in mind. Day by day they grew more sufficient for one another—not less fond of Judith and of Arthur, but more independent even of their help and company.

"Does she often ask about her mother—about whether she's coming back, and so on?" Arthur enquired of Judith.

"Very seldom, and she's quite content if you say 'Not yet.' But I think it'll be best to tell her the truth soon; then she'll settle down to it—to tell her that her mother isn't coming back, and isn't married to her father any more. You know how easily children accept what they're told; they don't know what's really involved, you see. By the time she's old enough to understand, she'll quite have accepted the position."

"But Bernadette will want to see her, won't she?"

"I don't know. I really hope not—at present at all events. You see what's happening now—Bernadette's just going out of her life. Seeing her might stop that. And yet, if we look at it honestly, isn't it the best thing that can happen?"

"In fact you want Bernadette completely—obliterated?" He frowned a little. To make that their object seemed rather ruthless. "A bit strong, isn't it?" he asked.

"Can she complain? Isn't it really the logic of the situation? With Bernadette what she is too—and the child what she is!"

"You're always terribly good at facing facts, Judith." He smiled. "A little weak in the idealising faculty!"

"In this family you've supplied that deficiency—amply."

"You musn't sneer at generous emotions. It's a bad habit you've got."

She smiled, yet seemed to consider what he said. "I believe it is a bad habit that I used to have. The old state of affairs here rather encouraged it. So many emotions all at cross-purposes! Rather a ridiculous waste of them! It made them seem ridiculous themselves. But I think I've got out of the habit."

"You've still a strong bias towards the mere matter-of-fact. You like humdrum states of mind—I believe you positively prefer them."

"And you like to pass from thrill to thrill!" She laughed. "Is that very unfair? Because I don't mean it to be. And I am changed a little, I think. What has happened here has made a difference. Say you think me a little—just a little—softer?"

"Say you think me a little—just a little—harder?" he retorted, mocking her.

"No, but seriously?" she persisted, fixing her eyes on him almost anxiously.

"Well then, yes. I think you're perceptibly more human," he acknowledged, laughing still.

A more serious description of the change that Arthur found in Judith might not have gone so near the mark. Though her judgment preserved the sanity which he admired—without emulation—and

her manner the cool satiric touch which he generally relished and sometimes resented, stress of circumstances had broken down her detachment and forced her out of her pose of critical but scarcely concerned spectator. She had become, willy-nilly, involved in the family fortunes; she could no longer merely look on, and smile, or deride; she had been forced to think, to act, and to feel—to take a part, to shoulder her share of the load. The latent faculties of her nature, ripe to spring into full womanhood, had answered to the call with instinctive readiness. So soon as there was work for her courage, her love and sympathy, she had them to give, and the more she gave the greater grew her store. Sustaining Godfrey, mothering Margaret, she had experienced something of the stirring and development of feeling which comes with marriage and motherhood. Through disaster and consolation, in ruin and the need to re-build, she had been forced to seek the rich things of her heart and had found abundance.

Thus she seemed 'perceptibly more human,' the change of heart revealing itself not only in her dealings with others but as surely, though more subtly, in herself. She opened out in a new spontaneity of feeling; she was easier to approach in confidence, more ready to appreciate and to share the joys of the spirit. Even in her bearing and looks there might be discerned a new alacrity, a new brightness of the eyes. Her mirth was heartier and more kindly; her mockery had lost its bitterness without losing its flavour.

Some such new, or revised, impression of her had formed itself in Arthur's mind and found voice now in his bantering speech. His gaze rested on her in pleasure as he added, "But you needn't carry it too far. Nobody wants you to become a gusher."

"Heaven forbid!" she murmured. "I really think I'm safe from that. I've too much native malice about me—and it will out!"

"Perpetual founts of warm emotion—geysers! Terrible people!"

"Oh, even you're hardly as bad as that!"

"They debase the emotional currency," said Arthur, with a sudden and violent change of metaphor.

On Christmas Day hard weather set in, with a keen frost. A few days of it promised skating on the low-lying meadows, now under flood. Full of hope and joyful anticipation, Arthur telegraphed for his skates.

"Can you skate? Have you got any skates? If you can't, I'll teach you," he said excitedly to Judith.

"I have skates, and I can skate—thank you all the same," she replied, smiling demurely. "But you and I can teach Margaret between us. I don't suppose Godfrey will care about doing it."

The frost held, their hopes were realised. Godfrey's attitude was what had been expected; with pathetic objurgations on the weather he shut himself up in his study. The other three sallied forth, though Margaret seemed alarmed and reluctant.

"I haven't skated for years," said Arthur, "but I used rather to fancy myself."

"Well, you start, while I give Margaret a lesson."

Arthur was an average skater—perhaps a little above the average of those who have been content to depend on the scanty natural opportunities offered by the English climate. He was master of the outside edge, and could manage a "three," an "eight" and, in a rather wobbly fashion, a few other simple figures. These he proceeded to execute, rather "fancying himself" as he had confessed, while Judith held Margaret in a firm grip and tried to direct her helplessly slithering feet.

"I don't think I like skating," said Margaret, with her usual mild firmness. "I can't stand up, and it makes my ankles ache."

"Oh, but you're only just beginning, dear."

"I don't think I like it, Cousin Judith."

Judith's brows went up in humorous despair. "Just like Godfrey!" she reflected helplessly. "Oh well, have a rest now, while I put my skates on and show you how nice it will be, when you've learnt how to do it."

"I don't think I shall ever like it, Cousin Judith. I think I shall go back and see what papa's doing."

Judith yielded. "Do as you like, Margaret," she said. "Perhaps you'll try again to-morrow?"

"Well, perhaps," Margaret conceded very doubtfully.

"The ice is splendid. Hurry up!" Arthur called.

But Judith did not hurry. After putting on her skates, she sat on a hurdle for some minutes, watching Arthur's evolutions with a thoughtful smile. He came to a stand opposite to her, after performing the most difficult figure in his repertory, his eyes and cheeks glowing and his breath coming fast. "How's that for high?" he asked proudly.

"Not bad for a beginner," she replied composedly. "Would you like really to learn to skate? Because, if you would, I'll give you a lesson."

"Well, I'm hanged! Come on, and let's see what you can do yourself!"

She got up and peeled off her jacket; before she put it down on the hurdle, she produced an orange from the pocket of it. Motioning Arthur to follow her, she glided gently to the middle of the ice and dropped the orange on to it. Having done this and given him a grave glance, she

proceeded to execute what was to him at least an inconceivably and dazzlingly complicated figure. When it was at last achieved, it landed her by his side, and she asked "How's that for high?"

"You humbug! How dare you say nothing about it? Letting me make a fool of myself like that! How did you learn?"

"Oh, in Switzerland. I often went there in the winter—before Hilsey claimed me. Come and try."

Arthur tried, but felt intolerably clumsy. His little skill was vanity, his craft mere fumbling! Yet gradually something seemed to impart itself from her to him—a dim inkling of the real art of it, not the power to do as she did, but some idea of why she had the power and of what he must do to gain it. She herself seemed to be far beyond skill or art. She seemed part of the ice—an emanation from it, a spirit-form it gave out.

"Why, you must be a champion, Judith!"

"I just missed it, last year I was out," she answered. "I think you show quite a knack."

"I've had enough. Give me an exibition!"

"Really?" He nodded, and she smiled in pleasure. "I love it better than anything in the world," she said, as she turned and darted away across the ice.

He sat down on the hurdle, and smoked his pipe while he watched her. He could see her glowing cheeks, her eyes gleaming with pleasure, her confident enraptured smile—above all, the graceful daring turns and twists of her slim figure, so full of life, of suppleness, of the beauty of perfect balance and of motion faultlessly controlled—all sign of effort hidden by consummate mastery. She was grace triumphant, and the triumph irradiated her whole being—her whole self—with a rare fine exhilaration; it infected the onlooker and set his blood tingling through his veins in sympathetic exultation.

At last she came to a stop opposite to him—cheeks red, eyes shining, chest heaving, still full of that wonderful motion waiting to be loosed again at the bidding of her will.

"I never saw anything like it!" he cried. "You're beautiful, beautiful, Judith!"

"You mean—it's beautiful," she laughed, her cheeks flushing to a more vivid red.

"I meant what I said," he persisted almost indignantly. "Beautiful!"

She did not try to conceal her pleasure and pride. "I'm glad, Arthur."

"Look here, you've got to teach me how to do it—some of it, anyhow."

"I will, if the frost will only last. Let's pray to heaven!"

"And you've got to come to Switzerland with me next winter."

"I'll think about that!"

"In fact every winter—if you'll kindly think about that too!" He got up with a merry ringing laugh. "God bless the frost! Let's have another shot at waltzing? You've inspired me—I believe I shall do it better!"

He did it—a little better—and she ardently encouraged him; the slender supple strength of her figure resting against his arm seemed a help more than physical, almost, as he said, an inspiration. Yet presently he stopped, and would have her skate by herself again.

"No, that's enough for this morning," she protested. Yet, when he begged, she could not but do as he asked once more; his praises fell so sweet on her ears. At the end she glided to him and held out her hands, putting them in his. "No more, no more! I—I feel too excited!"

"So do I, somehow," he said, laughing, as he clasped her hands, and their eyes met in exultant joyfulness. "You've given me a new vision of you, Judith!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE LINES OF LIFE

The glorious frost lasted a glorious week, generous measure for an English frost, and long enough for Arthur to make considerable improvement in the art of skating; since Margaret maintained her attitude of not caring about it, he had the benefit of the professor's undivided attention. Long enough too it lasted for the new vision to stamp itself deep on his mind. For companion picture he recalled from memory another, which at the outset had made no such vivid impression—Judith crying over the failure of the farce. His mind had passed it by lightly when it was first presented to him; it had not availed to turn his amused thoughts from Miss Ayesha Layard and her medicine. It came back now, at first by what seemed only a chance or freak of memory, but presently establishing for itself a relation with its sister-vision of triumphant grace. Between them they gave to Judith in his eyes something that he had not discerned before—something which had always been there, though not in such full measure in the earlier days of their acquaintance, before disaster and grief, and love and sympathy, had wrought upon her spirit. He saw her now—he was idealising again, no doubt, to some degree, after that generous

fashion of his which no cold steel of experience could quite eradicate—as capable of the depths and heights of emotion; no longer as tethered too tight by reason and good sense, somewhat too critical, a trifle too humdrum in her notions—that was the conception of her which he had in the days of Bernadette's reign. The solid merits of that type he left to her still; and in this he was indeed on the firm ground of experience; he had tried and tested them. But now he decked them with bright ornaments and blended their sober useful tints with richer colouring—with tenderness of heart, a high brave joy in life, the grace of form and charm of face in which the eye delights.

Subtly and delightfully sure of his changed vision of her, she dared now to be wholly herself with him, to maintain no shy reserves where prudence held pleasure in bondage, and affection took refuge from the fear of indifference. She borrowed of him too, though this unconsciously, in an instinct to adapt herself to him. As she had lent to him from her stores of fortitude and clear-sightedness, she levied toll for herself on his wealth of persistent and elastic cheerfulness, his gust for life and all that life brings with it.

Yet her old self was not eclipsed nor wholly transformed. Her caution remained, and her healthy distrust of sudden impulses. The satiric smile was still on her lips, to check transports and cool the glow of fascination. She had been so wont to think him Bernadette's man—whether in joy or in delusion, or in the cruel shock of sudden enlightenment—so wont to think Bernadette invincible, that even Bernadette's memory seemed a thing that could hardly be displaced. She craved a probation, a searching test both of her own feelings and of Arthur's. She feared while she enjoyed, and of set purpose nursed her doubts. There was not always skating—not always bright sun, keen air, and the rapture of motion, incentives to hot blood. If he deluded himself, she would have compassion ready and friendship for him unimpaired; but if she, with open eyes, walked into a trap, her judgment of herself would be bitter, and friendship would scarcely stand against the shame.

Arthur went back to town ten days before the Christmas vacation ended, to look after his work and, incidentally, to attend Marie Sarradet's wedding. He left Hilsey cheerfully, with no real sense of a parting or of separation. He was still keen and excited about his work, about the life that seemed now to lie before him in the law, and Hilsey—with all it meant to him—figured no longer as a distraction from that life, or even an enemy to it, but rather as its background and complement, so much a part of it as to seem with him while he worked. And so it was with Judith herself—the new Judith of the new vision. She was no enemy to work either. However bedecked and glorified, she was still Judith of the cool head and humorous eyes, the foe of extravagance and vain conceits.

"Back to my dog!" he said gaily. "Holding on to his tail, I'll climb the heights of fortune! And I hope one or two more will find their way to chambers—some little puppies, at all events."

"Ambition is awake! I seem to see a dawning likeness to Mr. Norton Ward."

"I seem to see, as in a golden dream, enough to pay his rent, confound him!"

"I discern, as it were from afar off, a silk gown gracefully hanging about your person!"

"I discern money in my pocket to pay a railway fare to Switzerland!"

"There rises before my eyes a portly man in a high seat! He administers Justice!"

"Before mine, a lady, gracious and ample, who——" But that final vision was promptly dispelled by a cushion which Judith hurled at him with unerring aim.

Marie Sarradet and Sidney Barslow were married at Marylebone Church, and after the ceremony there was a gathering of old friends at the house in Regent's Park—the family (including Mrs. Veltheim), Amabel Osling, Mildred Quain, Joe Halliday, and Mr. Claud Beverley, the last-named (and so named still in the Sarradet circle) blushing under congratulations; for the drama of real life had met with a critical success, though the London run had not as yet followed. Indeed, as befitted the occasion, a sense of congratulation pervaded the air. It seemed as though more than a wedding were celebrated. They toasted in their champagne the restored stability of the family and the business also. The bridegroom, Managing Director of Sarradet's Limited, showed signs of growing stout; there was a very solid settled look about him; order, respectability, and a comfortable balance at the bank were the suggestions his appearance carried. Far, far in the past the rowdy gaieties of Oxford Street! Old Sarradet basked in the sun of recovered safety and tranquillity. Even Raymond, still nominally "on appro," used, all unrebuked, such airs of possession towards Amabel that none could doubt his speedy acceptance. Marie herself was in a serene content which not even the presence of her aunt could cloud. She greeted Arthur with affectionate friendship.

"It is good of you to come. It wouldn't have seemed right without you," she told him, when they got a few words apart.

"I had to come. You don't know how glad I am of your happiness, Marie."

She looked at him frankly, smiling in a confidential meaning. "Yes, I think I do. We've been very great friends, haven't we? And we will be. Yes, I am happy. It's all worked in so well, and Sidney is so good to me." She blushed a little as she added, with frank simplicity, "I love him, Arthur."

He knew why she told him; it was that no shadow of self-reproach should remain with him. He pressed her hand gently. "God bless you, and send you every happiness!"

She lowered her voice. "And you? Because I've a right to wish you happiness too."

"Fretting about me! And on your wedding day!" he rebuked her gaily.

"Yes, just a little," she acknowledged, laughing.

"Well, you needn't. No, honestly you needn't." He laughed too. "I'm shamefully jolly!"

"Then it's all perfect," she said with a sigh of contentment.

Arthur had missed seeing *Jephthah's Daughter* owing to his mother's death, but since not having seen or read the work is not always a disadvantage when congratulations have to be offered to the author, he expressed his heartily to Mr. Beverley. "Next time it's put up, I shall be there," he added.

"I don't know that it ever will be—and I don't much care if it isn't. It's not bad in its way—you've seen some of the notices, I daresay?—but I'm not sure that it's my real line. I'm having a shot at something rather different. If it succeeds——"

Arthur knew what was coming. "You shan't chuck the office before we've found the dog, anyhow!" he interrupted, laughing. But none the less he admired the sanguine genius. "Only there won't be enough 'lines' to last him out at this rate," he reflected.

At the end—when bride and bridegroom had driven off—Arthur suddenly found his hand seized and violently shaken by old Mr. Sarradet, who was in a state of excited rapture. "The happiest day of my life!" he was saying. "What I've always hoped for! Always, Mr. Lisle, from the beginning!"

He seemed to have no recollection of a certain interview in Bloomsbury Street—an interview abruptly cut short by the arrival of a lady in a barouche. He was growing old, his memory played him tricks. He had found a strong arm to lean on and, rejoicing in it, forgot that it had not always been the thing which he desired.

"Yes, you know a good thing when you see it, Mr. Sarradet," Arthur smilingly told the proud old man. But he did it with an amused consciousness that Mrs. Veltheim, who stood by, eyeing him rather sourly, had a very clear remembrance of past events.

"We'll give 'em a dinner when they come back. You must come, Mr. Lisle. Everybody here must come," old Sarradet went on, and shuffled round the room, asking everyone to come to the dinner. "And now, one more glass of champagne! Oh yes, you must! Yes, you too, Amabel—and you, Mildred! Come, girls, a little drop! Here's a health to the Happy Pair and to Sarradet's Limited!"

"The Happy Pair and Sarradet's Limited!" repeated everybody before they drank.

"*And* Sarradet's Limited!" reiterated the old man, taking a second gulp.

"I don't know when he'll stop," whispered Joe Halliday.

"If we don't want to get screwed, we'd better make a bolt of it, Arthur."

So they did, and went for a stroll in the Park to cool their heads.

"Well, that's good-bye to them!" said Joe, when he had lit his cigar. "And it's good-bye to me for a bit too. I'm sailing the day after to-morrow. Going to Canada."

"Are you? Rather sudden, isn't it? Going to be gone long?"

"I don't know. Just as things turn out. I may be back in a couple of months; I may not turn up again till I'm a Colonial Premier or something of that sort. The fact is, I've got into no end of a good thing out there. A cert.—well, practically a cert. I wish I'd been able to put you in for a thou. or two, old fellow."

"No, thanks! No, thanks!" exclaimed Arthur, laughing.

"But it wasn't to be done. All I could do to get in myself! Especially as I'm pretty rocky. However they wanted my experience——"

"Of Canada? Have you ever been there?"

"I suppose Canada's much like other places," said Joe, evading the direct question. "It's my experience of business they wanted, of course, you old fool. I'm in for a good thing this time, and no mistake! If I hadn't had too much fizz already, I'd ask you to come and drink my health."

"Good luck anyhow, old fellow! I'm sorry you're going away, though. I shan't enjoy seeing Trixie Kayper half as much without you."

Joe suddenly put his arm in Arthur's. "You're a bit of a fool in some ways, in my humble judgment," he said. "But you're a good chap, Arthur. You stick to your pals, you don't squeal when you drop your money, and you don't put on side. As this rotten old world goes, you're not a bad chap."

"This sounds like a parting testimonial, Joe!"

"Well, what if it does? God knows when we shall eat a steak and drink a pot of beer together again! A good loser makes a good winner, and you'll be a winner yet. And damned glad I shall be to see it! Now I must toddle—get in the Tube and go to the City. Good-bye, Arthur."

"Good-bye, Joe. I say, I'm glad we did *Did You Say Mrs.?* Perhaps you'll run up against Ayesha Layard over there. Give her my love."

"Oh, hang the girl! I don't want to see her! So long then, old chap!" With a final grip he turned and walked away quickly.

Arthur saw him go with a keen pang of regret. They had tempted fortune together, and each had liked what he found in the other. Joe's equal mind—which smiled back when the world smiled, and, when it frowned, thought a cheerful word of abuse notice enough to take of its tantrums—made him a good comrade, a good stand-by; his humour, crude though it was and pre-eminently of the market-place, put an easier face on trying situations. He had a faithful, if critical, affection for his friends, and Arthur was not so rich in friends as to lose the society of one like this without sorrow. As it chanced, his intimates of school and university days had drifted into other places and other occupations which prevented them from being frequent companions, and he had as yet not replaced them from the ranks of his profession, from among the men he met in the courts and in the Temple; up to now courts and Temple had been too much places to get away from, too little the scene of his spare hours and his real interests, to breed intimacies, though, of course, they had produced acquaintances. As he walked down to the Temple now, after parting from Joe Halliday—and for how long Heaven alone could tell!—he felt lonely and told himself that he must get to know better the men among whom his life was cast. He found himself thinking of his life in the Temple as something definitely settled at last, not as a provisional sort of arrangement which might go on or, on the other hand, might be ended any day and on any impulse. The coils of his destiny had begun to wind about him.

It was vacation still, and chambers were deserted; Henry and the boy departed at four o'clock in vacation. He let himself in with his key, lit his fire, induced a blaze in it, and sat down for a smoke before it. Marie Sarradet came back into his mind now—Marie Barslow; the new name set him smiling, recalling, wondering. How if the new name had not been Barslow but another? Would that have meant being the prop of the family and the business, being engulfed in Sarradet's Limited? That was what it meant for Sidney Barslow—among other things, of course. But who could tell what things might mean? Suppose the great farce had succeeded, had really been a gold mine—of the sort with gold in it—really a second *Help Me out Quickly!* Where would he be now—he and his thousands of pounds—if that had happened? Would he have been producing more farces, and giving more engagements to infectious Ayesha Layard and indefatigable Willie Spring?

Dis aliter visum—Fate decreed otherwise. Detached from the fortunes of Sarradet's Limited, rudely—indeed very rudely—repulsed from the threshold of theatrical venture, he had come back to his Legitimate Mistress. He knew her ways—her rebuffs, her neglect, her intolerable procrastination; but he had enjoyed just a taste of her favour and attractions too—of the interest and excitement, of the many-sided view of life, that she could give. Because of these, and also because of her high dignity and great traditions—things in which Sarradet's Limited and theatrical ventures seemed to him not so rich—he made up his mind to follow the beckoning of fate's finger and to stick to her, even though she half-starved him, and tried him to the extreme limit of his patience—after her ancient wont.

But his renewed allegiance was to be on terms; so at least he tried to pledge the future. He did not want his whole life and thought swallowed up. Here his own temperament had much to say, but his talks with Sir Christopher a good deal also. He would not be a sleuth-hound on the track of success (a Norton Ward, as he defined it to himself privily), nose to the ground, awake to that scent only, with no eyes for the world about him—or again, as it might be put, he would not have his life just a ladder, a climb up the steep side of a cliff, in hope of an eminence dizzy and uncertain enough even if he got there, and with a handsome probability of tumbling into the tomb half-way up. Could terms be made with the exacting Mistress about this? Really he did not know. So often she either refused all favours or stifled a man under the sheer weight of them. That was her way. Still, Sir Christopher had dodged it.

Suddenly he fell to laughing over the ridiculousness of these meditations. Afraid of too much work, when but for that dog he was briefless still! Could there be greater absurdity or grosser vanity? Yet the idea stuck—thanks perhaps to Sir Christopher—and under its apparent inanity possessed a solid basis. There was not only a career which he wished to run; there was a sort of man that he wanted to be, a man with broad interests and far-reaching sympathies, in full touch with the varieties of life, and not starved of its pleasures. Thus hazily, with smiles to mock his dreams, in that quiet hour he outlined the future of his choice, the manner of man that he would be.

The ringing of the telephone bell recalled him sharply to the present. With a last smiling "Rot!" muttered under his breath at himself, with a quick flash of hope that it was Wills and Mayne again, he went to answer the call. A strange voice with a foreign accent enquired his number, then asked if Mr. Arthur Lisle were in, and, on being told that it was that gentleman who was speaking, begged him to hold the line. The next moment another voice, not strange at all though it seemed long since he had heard it, asked, "Is that you, Cousin Arthur?"

"Yes, it's me," he answered, with a sudden twinge of excitement.

"I'm at the Lancaster—over here on business with the lawyers, just for a day or two. Oliver's in Paris. I want to see you about something, but I hardly hoped to find you in town. I thought you'd be at Hilsey. How lucky! Can you come and see me some time?"

"Yes, any time. I can come now, if you like. I'm doing nothing here."

A slight pause—Then—"Are you alone there, or is Frank Norton Ward there too?"

"There's absolutely nobody here but me."

"Then I think I'll come and see you. It's only a step. Will you look out for me?"

"Yes, I'll be looking out for you."

"In about a quarter of an hour then. Good-bye."

Arthur hung up the receiver and returned to his room—the telephone was in Henry's nondescript apartment. A smile quivered about his lips; he did not sit down again, but paced to and fro in a restless way. Strange to hear her voice, strange that she should turn up to-day! Of all the things he had been thinking about, he had not been thinking of her. She recalled herself now with all the effectiveness of the unexpected. She came suddenly out of the past and plunged him back into it with her "Cousin Arthur." He felt bewildered, yet definitely glad of one thing—a small one to all seeming, but to him comforting. He was relieved that she was coming to chambers, that he would not have to go to the Lancaster, and ask for her with proper indifference; ask for her by an unfamiliar name—at least he supposed she used that name! He felt certain that he would have blushed ridiculously if he had had to ask for her by that name. He nodded his head in relief; he was well out of that anyhow! And—she would be here directly!

CHAPTER XXXV

HILSEY AND ITS FUGITIVE

She met him just as of old; she gave him the same gay, gracious, almost caressing welcome when she found him at the foot of the stairs, awaiting her arrival and ready to escort her to his room. She put her arm through his and let him lead her there; then seated herself by the fire and, peeling off her gloves, looked up at him as he stood leaning his arm on the mantelpiece. She smiled as she used; she was the same Bernadette in her simple cordiality, the same too in her quiet sumptuousness. Only in her eyes, as they rested on his face, he thought he saw a new expression, a look of question, a half-humorous apprehension, which seemed to say, "How are you going to treat me, Cousin Arthur?" Not penitence, nor apology, but just an admission that he might have his own views about her and might treat her accordingly. "Tell me your views then—let's know how we stand towards one another!"

Perhaps it was because some such doubt found a place in her mind that she turned promptly, and in a rather business-like way, to the practical object of her visit.

"I came over to see my lawyers about the money question. They wanted to see me, and convince me I ought to take something from Godfrey. I don't know that I should refuse if I needed it, but I don't. You know what lawyers are! They told me Oliver would desert me, or practically said he would! Well, I said I was going to chance that—as a fact he's settling quite a lot on me—and at last they gave in, though they were really sulky about it. Then they told me that I ought to settle something about Margaret. Godfrey's been very kind there too; he's offered to let me see her practically whenever I like—with just one condition, a natural one, I suppose." She paused for a moment and now leant forward, looking into the fire. "I shouldn't have quarrelled with that condition. I couldn't. Of course he wouldn't want her to see Oliver." She frowned a little. "I told the lawyers that the matter wasn't pressing, as I was going abroad, for a year probably, perhaps longer; it could wait till I got back."

"You're going away?" asked Arthur, without much seeming interest.

"Yes—to Brazil. Oliver's got some interests there to look after." She smiled. "I daresay you think it happens rather conveniently? So it does, perhaps—but I think he'd have had to go anyhow; and of course I mean to go with him. But about Margaret. The real truth is, I didn't want to talk about her to the lawyers; I couldn't tell them what I really felt. I want to tell you, Arthur, if I can, and I want you somehow to let Godfrey know about it—and Judith too. That's what I want you to do for me. Will you?"

"I'll do my best. He won't like talking about it. He may be very unapproachable."

"I know he may!" She smiled again. "But you'll try, won't you?" She looked up at him gravely now, and rather as though she were asking his judgment. "I'm not going to see her, Arthur."

"You mean—not at all? Never?" he asked slowly.

"It was always rather difficult for Margaret and me to get on together, even before all that's happened. We didn't make real friends. How could we now—with sort of official visits like those? Under conditions! Still, that's not the main thing; that's not what I want you to say to Godfrey. I don't mean to see her till she's old enough—fully old enough—to understand what it all means. Then, when she's heard about it—not from me, I don't want to make a case with her or to try to justify myself—when Godfrey, or Judith, or even you, have told her, I want it to be left to her what to do. If she likes to leave it alone, very good. If she likes to see me, and see if we can make friends, I shall be ready. There'll be no concealment then, no false pretences, nothing to puzzle her. Only just what sort of a view she takes of me herself, when she's old enough." She paused and then asked, "Have they told her anything yet?"

"Only that you can't come back yet. But I think they mean to tell her presently that you won't, that—well, that it's all over, you know. Judith thinks she'll accept that as quite—well, that she won't see anything very extraordinary about it—won't know what it means, you see."

"Do you think she misses me much?"

"No, I don't think so. She and her father are becoming very great friends. I think she's happy."

"You've been there a lot?"

"Yes, a good deal."

"I saw your mother's death in the paper. I'm sorry, Arthur."

"They make me quite at home at Hilsey. They've given me a den of my own."

"And Godfrey?"

"He's very cheerful, with his walks and his books—and, as I say, with Margaret."

"You're looking very thoughtful, Arthur. What are you thinking of? Do you think me wrong about Margaret? I shall hear of her, you know. I shall know how she's getting on; Judith will tell me—and Esther. You can too."

"It's all so strange!" he broke out. "The way you've just—vanished! And yet the house goes on!"

She nodded. "And goes on pretty well?" she hazarded, with raised brows and a little smile. He made a restless impatient gesture, but did not refuse assent. "Well, if there's anything to be said for me, there it is! Because it means that I was a failure."

"You weren't the only failure, Bernadette."

"No, I wasn't. It was all a failure—all round—except you; you got on with all of us. Well, when things are like that, and then somebody comes and—and shows you something quite different, and makes—yes, makes—you look at it—well, when once you do, you can't look at anything else. It swallows up everything."

She fell into silence. Arthur moved from the mantelpiece, and sat down in a chair by her side, whence he watched her delicate profile as she gazed into the fire thoughtfully. He waited for her to go on—to take up the story from the day when the long failure came to its violent end, from the morning of her flight.

"I don't see how I could have done anything different; I don't see it now any more than I saw it then. You won't forgive Oliver, I suppose—my old Sir Oliver! In fact, if I know you, Cousin Arthur, you've been trying to paint him blacker in the hope of making me whiter! But he gives me a wonderful life. I never really knew what a man could do for a woman's life before. Well, I'd had no chance of understanding that, had I? It's not being in love that I mean so much. After all, I've been in love before—yes, and with Godfrey, as I told you once. And Oliver's not an angel, of course—about as far from it as a man could be——"

"I should think so," Arthur remarked drily.

She smiled at him. "But there's a sort of largeness about him, about the way he feels as well as the things he goes in for. And then his courage! Oh, but I daresay you don't want to hear me talk about him. I really came only to talk about Margaret."

"You must know I'm glad to hear you're happy."

She caught a tone of constraint in his voice; the words sounded almost formal. "Yes, I suppose you are—and ready to let it go at that?" she asked quickly, with a little resentment.

"What else can I do—or say?" he answered, slowly and with a puzzled frown. "I've got nothing more to do with it. I really belong to—to what you've left behind you. I made a queer mess of my part of it, but still I did belong there. I don't belong to this new life of yours, do I?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "No, I suppose you don't. You belong to Hilsey? Is that it? And I'm trying to get you on my side—unfairly?" She challenged him now with something like anger.

"Oh, it's not a question of sides! I tried not to take sides. The thing went too deep for that. And why must I, why should I? But there's what's happened—the state of things, you see."

"And the state of things makes you belong to Hilsey, and prevents your having anything to do with me?"

"That's putting it too strongly——" he began.

"Oh, but you mean it comes to that?" she insisted.

"I don't see how, in practice, it can work out very differently from that."

His voice was low and gentle; he avoided her eyes as he spoke, though he knew they were upon him, watching him closely. He had come to this curious searching talk—or rather it had come upon him—totally unprepared. She had not been much in his thoughts lately; when he had thought of her, it had been in relation to the past, or to the household at Hilsey. Her present and future life had been remote, out of his ken, perhaps relegated to neglect by an instinctive repugnance, by a latent but surviving jealousy. Now he was faced with it, without time to consider, to get a clear view—much less to find diplomatic or dexterous phrases. If he were to say anything in reply to the questions with which Bernadette pressed him—and he could hardly be dumb—there was nothing for it but to give her bluntly what he thought, his raw reading of the position as it stood, the best he could make of it on the spur of the moment, without looking far forward, or anticipating future modifications and weighing the possible effect of them, and without going into any of the ethics of the case, without moral judgments or a casuistry nicely balancing the rights and wrongs of it; all that seemed futile, arrogant, not for him anyhow. The real present question was how the state of affairs which had come into being affected him in regard to Bernadette, what it left open to them. It was on that point that her questions pressed

him so closely and sharply.

What did she expect? A resumption of her empire over him? That the idol should be re-erected in the shrine, pieced together again and put in place to receive its worship? Then she could not understand all that had gone to the making and the adoration of it. The flight had brought mighty changes in and for her—had she not herself said so? In and for him was it to make none? She could hardly expect or claim that. Yet her questions, her resentment, a forlorn pettishness which had crept into her voice and manner, suggested that she was feeling hardly used, that she was disappointed and in some measure affronted by his attitude. She seemed to pit herself against Hilsey—against the household and the home she had elected to leave, for reasons good or bad, under impulses whether irresistible or merely wayward—to pit herself against it with something like scorn, even with jealousy. Had she not herself been all in all to him at Hilsey? Had it not been to him a setting for her charm and fascination, dear to him for her sake? The others there—what had they been to him? Oh, friends, yes, friends and kinsfolk, of course! But essentially, in his real thoughts, her attendants, her satellites—and largely the grievances against which his adoration had protested.

She remembered their last interview, the night before she went away—Arthur's despair, his sudden flare of hot passion, even the words in which he told her that she had been everything, nearly everything, in his life. Discount them as she might, calling them a boy's madness and self-delusion, how they had moved her even at that crisis of her life! They had smitten her with tender grief, and remained her last impression of her generous young devotee. She did not want to hear them again, nor to find that folly still in his heart. But they had been a witness to her power over him. Was it lost? What had destroyed it? Her flight with Oliver? That would be natural and intelligible, and was true in part, no doubt; nor did she complain of it. But it did not seem to be what was deepest in his mind, not the real stumbling-block. If it were a question of personal jealousy and a lover's disenchantment only, how came Hilsey into the matter? And it seemed that it was over Hilsey that they had come to an issue.

She sat a long while, brooding over his last answer, with her eyes still set on his averted face.

"You mean it'll work out that you're part of the family, and I'm not? Are you going to cut me, Arthur?"

"Oh, no, no!" he cried, turning to her now. "It's monstrous of you to say that! God knows I've no grudge against you! I've owed you too much happiness and—and felt too much for you. And if we must talk of sides, wasn't I always on your side?"

"Yes, but now you're not."

"I'm not against you—indeed I'm not! But if you're away somewhere with—well, I mean, away from us, and we're all together at home——"

"Us! We! Home!" she repeated after him, with a smile of rather sad mockery. "Yes, I suppose I begin to see, Arthur."

"They've made it home to me—especially since my mother's death."

Her resentment passed away. She seemed tranquil now, but sad and regretful. "Yes, I suppose that's the way it'll work," she said. "I shall get farther and farther off, and they'll get nearer and nearer!" She laid her hand on his for a moment, with one of her old light affectionate caresses. "I was silly enough to think that I could keep you, Arthur, somehow, in spite of all that's happened. And I wanted to. Because I'm very fond of you. But I suppose I can't. I'm a spoilt child—to think I could have you as well as all the rest I've got!" She smiled. "Awfully thorough life is, isn't it? Always making you go the whole hog when you think you can go half-way, just comfortably half-way! I don't like it, Cousin Arthur."

"I don't like it either, altogether; but that is the kind of way it gets you," he agreed thoughtfully.

"Still we can be good friends," she said, and then broke away from the conventional words with a quick impatience. "Oh, being good friends is such a different thing from being really friends, though!" She took up her gloves and began to put them on slowly. "I had a letter from Judith just before I came over," she remarked. "She writes every three or four weeks, you know. She said you were down there, and that she and you were having a good time skating."

"Yes, awfully jolly. She's a champion, you know!"

Bernadette was busy with her gloves. She did not see the sudden lighting-up of his eyes, as her words recalled to him the vision of Judith skating, the vivid grace of motion and the triumph of activity, there on the ice down at Hilsey.

"Oh, well, she's been to Switzerland in the winter a lot," said Bernadette carelessly. "I suppose she'd have gone this year, if it hadn't been for—" She raised her eyes again to his, and stopped with a glove half-way on. "Well, if it hadn't been for me, really!" She smiled, and jerked her head impatiently. "How I seem to come in everywhere, don't I? Well, I can't help it! She's got no one else belonging to her, and she used to be a lot with us anyhow."

"Oh, you needn't worry about her; she's quite happy," said Arthur confidently.

"I don't know that I was worrying, though I daresay I ought to have been. But she likes being there. I expect she'll settle down there for good and all." As she went back to her glove-buttoning she added, by way of an after-thought, "Unless she marries."

Knowing the thing that was taking shape in his own heart, and reading his own thoughts into the mind of another, as people are prone to do, Arthur expected here a certain suggestion, was

wondering how to meet it, and was in a way afraid of it. He felt a sense of surprise when Bernadette passed directly away from the subject, leaving her after-thought to assume the form of a merely perfunctory recognition of the fact that Judith was a girl of marriageable age and therefore might marry—perhaps with the implication that she was not particularly likely to, however. He was relieved, but somehow a little indignant.

"You've told me hardly anything about yourself," said Bernadette. But here again the tone sounded perfunctory, as though the topic she suggested were rather one about which she ought to inquire than one in which she felt a genuine interest.

"Oh, there's not much to tell. I've sown my wild oats, and now I've settled down to work."

She seemed content with the answer, whose meagreness responded sensitively to her own want of a true concern. She was not really interested, he felt, in any life that he might be living apart from her. She was very fond of him, as she said and he believed; but it was fondness, a liking for his company, an enjoyment of him, a desire to have him about her, had such a thing been still possible; it was not such a love or deep affection as would make his doings or his fortunes in themselves of great importance to her. Where his life was not in actual contact with her own, it did not touch her feelings deeply. Well, she had always been rather like that, taking what she wanted of his life and time, leaving the rest, and paying with her smiles. Well paid too, he had thought himself, and had made no complaint.

He did not complain now either. He had never advanced any claim to more than her free grace bestowed; and what she gave had been to him great. But he felt a contrast. At home—his thoughts readily used that word now—his fortunes were matter for eager inquiry, excited canvass and speculation. His meagre answer would not have sufficed there. Judith and little Margaret had to hear about everything; even old Godfrey fussed about in easy earshot and listened furtively. It was not that Bernadette had changed; there was no reason to blame her, or call her selfish or self-centred. It was the others who had changed towards him, and he towards them, and he in himself. For Bernadette he was still what he had been before the flight—what Judith had once called a toy, though a very cherished one. To himself he seemed to have found, since then, not only a home but a life.

She did not know that; she had not seen it happening. Nobody had told her; probably she would not understand if anyone did—not even if he himself tried to; and the task would be difficult and ungracious. And of what use? It would seem like blame, though he intended none, and against blame she was very sensitive. It might make her unhappy—for she was very fond of him—and what purpose was served by marring ever so little a happiness which, whatever else it might or might not be, was at least hard-won?

She rose. "It must be getting late," she said, "and I'm going to the theatre. And back to Paris to-morrow! I shan't be in London again for a long long while. Well, you'll remember what to tell Godfrey—how I feel about Margaret? And—and anything kind about himself—if you think he'd like it."

"I don't really think I'd better risk that."

She smiled. "No, I suppose not. I'm never mentioned—is that it?"

"Oh, Judith and I talk about you."

"I daresay Judith is very—caustic?"

"Not particularly. Not nearly so caustic as when you were with us!"

"Us! Us! I begin to feel as if I'd run away from you too, Arthur! Though I wasn't your wife, or your mother—or even your chaperon, was I? Well, at the end I did run away a little sooner because of you—you'd found me out!—but I don't think I meant to run away from you for ever. But you belong to Hilsey now—so it seems as if it was for ever. I ran away for ever from Hilsey, all Hilsey—and now you're part of it!"

She was standing opposite to him, with a smile that seemed half to tease him, half to deride herself. She did not seek to hide her sorrow and vexation at losing him; she hardly pretended not to be jealous—he could think her jealous if he liked! Her old sincerity abode with her; she had no tricks.

She looked very charming in his eyes; her sorrow at losing her—he did not know what to call it, but whatever it was that she used to get from his society and his adoration—touched him profoundly. He took one of her gloved hands and raised it to his lips. She looked up at him; her eyes were dim.

"It's turned out rather harder in some ways than I thought it would—making quite a fresh start, I mean. I do miss the old things and the old friends dreadfully. But it's worth it. It was the only thing for me. There was nothing else left to do. I had to do it."

"You're the only judge," he said gently. "Thank God it's turned out right for you!"

She smiled under her dim eyes. "Did you think I should repent? Like those frogs—you remember?—in the fable. King Stork instead of King Log?" She laughed. "It's not like that." She paused a moment. "And Oliver and I aren't to be alone together, I think, Cousin Arthur."

He sought for words, but she put her slim fingers lightly on his lips. "Hush! I don't want to cry. Take me to a taxi—Quickly!"

She spoke no more to him—nor he to her, save to whisper, with a last clasp of her hand before

she drove away, "God bless you!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN THE SPRING

Yes, it was all true! The events of that Red Letter Day had really happened. When Arthur awoke the next morning, he had a queer feeling of its all being a dream, a mirage born of ambition. No. The morning paper proved it; a glance at his own table added confirmation.

Revolving Time had brought round the Easter vacation again. The last case heard in the Court of Appeal that sittings was *Crewdson v. The Great Southern Railway Company*, on appeal from Knaresby, J.'s, judgment on the findings of the jury. (The subsequent history of the great Dog Case lay still in the future.) It was a time of political excitement; Sir Humphrey Fynes, K.C., M.P., had chanced the case being reached, and gone off to rouse the country to a proper sense of its imminent peril if the Government continued so much as a day longer in office. Consequently he was not there to argue Miss Crewdson's case. Mr. Tracy Darton, K.C., was there, but he was also in the fashionable divorce case of the moment, and had to address the jury on the respondent's behalf. He cut his argument before the Court of Appeal suspiciously short, and left to his learned friend Mr. Lisle the task of citing authorities bearing on tricky points relating to the subject of Common Carriers. Arthur was in a tremor when he rose—nearly as much frightened as he had been before Lance and Pretyman, JJ., a year ago—but his whole heart was with his dog; he grew excited, he stuck to his guns; they should have those authorities if he died for it! He was very tenacious—and in the end rather long perhaps. But the Court listened attentively, smiling now and then at his youthful ardour, but letting him make his points. When they came to give judgment against his contention, they went out of the way to compliment him. The Master of the Rolls said the Court was indebted to Mr. Lisle for his able argument. Leonard, L.J., confessed that he had been for a moment shaken by Mr. Lisle's ingenious argument. Pratt, L.J., quite agreed with what had fallen from My Lord and his learned Brother concerning Mr. Lisle's conduct of his case. Even Miss Crewdson herself, whose face had been black as thunder at Sir Humphrey's desertion and Mr. Darton's unseemly brevity, and whose shoulders had shrugged scornfully when Arthur rose, found a smile for him in the hour of temporary defeat; that she would lose in the end never entered the indomitable woman's head. Then—out in the corridor, when all was over—Tom Mayne patted him on the back, and almost danced round him for joy and pride—it was impossible to recognise in him the melancholy Mr. Beverley—Norton Ward, hurrying off to another case, called out, "Confound your cheek!" and, to crown all, the august solicitor of the Great Southern Railway Company, his redoubtable opponents, gave him a friendly nod, saying, "I was afraid you were going to turn 'em at the last moment, Mr. Lisle!" That his appreciation was genuine Arthur's table proved. There, newly deposited by triumphant Henry, lay a case to advise the Great Southern Railway Company itself.

"Once you get in with them, sir——!" Henry had said, rubbing his hands together and leaving the rest to the imagination.

Such things come seldom to any man, but once or twice in their careers to many. They came to Arthur as the crown of a term's hard work, mostly over Norton Ward's briefs—for Norton Ward had come to rely on him now and kept him busy 'devilling'—but with some little things of his own too; for Wills and Mayne were faithful, and another firm had sent a case also. His neck was well in the collar; his fee book had become more than a merely ornamental appurtenance. Long and hard, dry and dusty, was the road ahead. Never mind! His feet were on it, and if he walked warily he need fear no fatal slip. Letting the case to advise wait—his opinion would not be needed before the latter part of the vacation, Henry said—he sat in his chair, smoking and indulging in pardonably rosy reflections.

"Rather different from what it was this time last year!" said Honest Pride with a chuckle.

A good many things had been rather different with him a year ago, he might have been cynically reminded; for instance the last Easter vacation he had dedicated to Miss Marie Sarradet, and he was not dedicating this coming one to Mrs. Sidney Barslow; and other things, unknown a year ago, had figured on the moving picture of his life, and said their say to him, and gone their way. But to-day he was looking forward and not back, seeing beginnings, not endings, not burying the past with tears or smiles, but hailing the future with a cheery cry of welcome for its hazards and its joys.

Henry put his head in at the door. "Sir Christopher Lance has rung up, sir, and wants to know if you'll lunch with him to-day at one-thirty—at his house."

"Yes, certainly. Say, with pleasure." Left alone again, Arthur ejaculated "Splendid!" Sir Christopher had seen the report in the paper! He read the law reports, of course. A thought crossed Arthur's mind—would they read the law reports at Hilsey? They might not have kept their eye on his case. He folded up the paper and put it carefully in the little bag which he was now in the habit of carrying to and fro between his lodgings and his chambers.

Sir Christopher was jubilant over the report. "A feather in your cap to get that out of Leonard—a crusty old dog, but a deuced fine lawyer!" he said. But the news of the case from the Great

Southern Railway Company meant yet more to him. "If they take you up, they can see you through, Arthur."

"If I don't make a fool of myself," Arthur put in.

"Oh, they'll expect you to do that once or twice. Don't be frightened. The dog of yours is a lucky dog, eh? All you've got to do now is to take things quietly, and not fret. Remember that only one side can win, and it's not to be expected that you'll be on the right side always. I think you'll be done over the dog even, in the end, you know."

"Not I!" cried Arthur indignantly. "That Harrogate cur's not our dog, sir."

"Human justice is fallible," laughed the old man. "Anyhow it's a good sporting case. And what are you going to do with yourself now?"

"I'm off to Hilsey for a fortnight's holiday. Going at four o'clock."

"Losing no time," Sir Christopher remarked with a smile.

"Well, it's jolly in the country in the spring, isn't it?" Arthur asked, rather defensively.

"Yes, it's jolly in the spring—jolly anywhere in the spring, Arthur."

Arthur caught the kindly banter in his tone; he flushed a little and smiled in answer. "It was very jolly there in the winter too, if you come to that, sir. Ripping skating!"

"Does all the family skate?"

"No, not all the family." He laughed. "Just enough of it, Sir Christopher."

The old man sat back in his chair and sipped his hock. "Some men can get on without a woman about them but, so far as I've observed you, I don't think you're that sort. If you must have a woman about you, there's a good deal to be said for its being your own wife, and not, as so often happens, somebody else's. May we include that among our recent discoveries?"

"But your own wife costs such a lot of money."

"So do the others—very often. Don't wait too long for money, or for too much of it. Things are jolliest in the spring!"

"I suppose I'm rather young. I'm only twenty-five, you know."

"And a damned good age for making love too!" Sir Christopher pronounced emphatically.

"Oh, of course, if that's your experience, sir!" laughed Arthur.

Sir Christopher grew graver. "Does the wound heal at Hilsey?"

"Yes, I think so—slowly."

"Surgery's the only thing sometimes; when you can't cure, you must cut. At any rate we won't think hardly of our beautiful friend. I don't believe, though, that you're thinking of her at all, you young rascal! You're thinking of nothing but that train at four o'clock."

Arthur was silent a moment or two. "I daresay that some day, when it's a bit farther off, I shall be able to look at it all better—to see just what happened and what it came to. But I can't do that now. I—I haven't time." They had finished lunch. He came and rested his hand on the old man's shoulder. "At any rate, it's brought me your friendship. I can't begin to tell you what that is to me, sir."

Sir Christopher looked up at him. "I can tell you what it is to me, though. It's a son for my barren old age—and I'm quite ready to take a daughter too, Arthur."

Arthur went off by the four o'clock train, with his copy of *The Times* in his pocket. But out of that pocket it never emerged, save in the privacy of his den, and there it was hidden carefully. Never in all his life did he confess that he had "happened" to bring it down with him. For, on the platform at Hilsey, the first thing he saw was Judith waiting for him. As soon as he put his head out of the window, she ran towards him, brandishing *The Times* in her hand. No motive to produce his copy, no need to confess that he had brought it!

His attitude towards Judith's copy was one of apparent indifference. It could not be maintained in face of her excitement and curiosity. The report seemed to have had on her much the same effect as skating. She proposed to walk home, and let the car take his luggage, and, as soon as they were clear of the station, she cried, "Now you've got to tell me all—all—about it! What are the Rolls, and who's the Master of them? What's Lord Justice Leonard like? And the other one—what's his name?—Pratt? And what was it in your speech that they thought so clever?"

"I thought perhaps you wouldn't see it," said Arthur, not mentioning that he had taken his own measures to meet that contingency, had it arisen.

"Not see it! Why, I hunt all through those wretched cases every morning of my life, looking for that blessed dog of yours! So I shall, till it's found, or buried, or something. Now begin at the beginning, and tell me just how everything happened."

"I say, this isn't the shortest way home, you know."

"I know it isn't. Begin now directly, Arthur." She had hold of his arm now, *The Times* still in her other hand. "Godfrey's quite excited too—for him. He'd have come, only he's got a bad cold; and Margaret stayed to comfort him. Begin now!"

His attitude of indifference had no chance. All the story was dragged from him by reiterated "And

thens—?" He warmed to it himself, working up through their lordships, through Miss Crewdson's smile ("She looks an uncommonly nice old girl," he interjected), through Tom Mayne's raptures and Norton Ward's jocose tribute, to the climax of the august solicitor and the case to advise which attested his approval. "That may mean a lot to me," Arthur ended.

"The people you'd been trying to beat!" Her voice sounded awed at the wonder of it. "I should have thought they'd just hate you. I wish I was a man, Arthur! Aren't you awfully proud of it all?"

Well, he was awfully proud, there was no denying it. "I wish the dear old mater could have read it!"

She pressed his arm. "We can read it. I've helped Margaret to spell it out. She's feeling rather afraid of you, now that you've got your name in the paper. And Godfrey's been looking up all the famous Lisles in the County History! You won't have to be doing Frank Norton Ward's work for him now all the time—and for nothing too!"

In vain he tried to tell her how valuable the devilling was to him. No, she thought it dull, and was inclined to lay stress on the way Norton Ward found his account in it. Arthur gave up the effort, but, somewhat alarmed by the expectations he seemed to be raising, ventured to add, "Don't think I'm going to jump into five thousand a year, Judith!"

"Let me have my little crow out, and then I'll be sensible about it," she pleaded.

But he did not in his heart want her sensible; her eyes would not be so bright, nor her cheeks glow with colour; her voice would not vibrate with eager joyfulness, nor her laugh ring so merrily; infectious as Miss Ayesha Layard's own, it was really! Small wonder that he caught the infection of her sanguine pleasure too. Long roads seemed short that evening, whether they led to fame and fortune, or only through the meadows and across the river to Hilsey Manor.

"Now the others will want to hear all about it," said Judith, with something like a touch of jealousy.

The story had to be told again—this time with humorous magniloquence for Margaret's benefit, with much stress on their lordships' wigs and gowns, a colourable imitation of their tones and manner, and a hint of the awful things they might have done to Arthur if he had displeased them—which Margaret, with notions of a trial based on *Alice in Wonderland*, was quite prepared to believe. Godfrey shuffled about within earshot, his carpet slippers (his cold gave good excuse for them) padding up and down the room as he listened without seeming to listen, and his shy, "Very—very—er—satisfactory to you, Arthur!" coming with a pathetic inadequacy at the end of the recital.

Then—before dinner—a quiet half-hour in his own den upstairs, where everything was ready for him and seemed to expect him, where fresh fragrant flowers on table and chimney-piece revealed affectionate anticipation of his coming, where the breeze blew in, laden with the sweetness of spring, through the open windows. As he sat by them, he could hear the distant cawing of the rooks and see the cattle grazing in the meadows. The river glinted under the setting sun, the wood on the hill stood solid and sombre with clear-cut outline. The Peace of God seemed to rest on the old place and to wrap it round in a golden tranquillity. His heart was in a mood sensitive to the suggestion. He rested after his labours, after the joyful excitement of the last twenty-four hours. So Hilsey too seemed to rest after its struggle, and to raise in kind security the head that had bent before the storm.

He had left his door ajar and had not heard anyone enter. But presently—it may be that he had fallen into a doze, or a state of passive contemplation very like one—he found Judith standing by the arm-chair in which he was reclining—oh, so lazily and pleasantly! She looked as if she might have been there for some little while, some few moments at all events, and she was gazing out on the fairness of the evening with a smile on her lips.

"I've been putting Margaret to bed—she was allowed an extra hour in your honour—and then I just looked in here to see if you wanted anything."

"I shall make a point of wanting as many things as I possibly can. I love being waited on, and I've never been able to get enough of it. I shall keep you busy! Judith, to think that I was once going to desert Hilsey! Well, I suppose we shall be turned out some day." He sighed lightly and humorously over the distant prospect of ejection by Margaret, grown-up, married perhaps, and the *châtelaine*.

"If you want to know your future, I happen to be able to tell you," said Judith. "Margaret arranged it while she was getting into bed."

"Oh, let's hear this! It's important—most important!" he cried, sitting up.

"If you don't want to go on living here, you're to have a house built for you up on the hill there. On the other side of the wood, I insisted; otherwise you'd spoil the view horribly! But Margaret didn't seem to mind about that."

"Yes, I think I must be behind the wood—especially if I'm to have a modern artistic cottage."

"There you're to live—when you're not in London, being praised by judges—and you're to come down the hill to tea every day of the week."

"It doesn't seem a bad idea—only she might sometimes make it dinner!"

"She'll make it dinner when she's bigger, I daresay. At present, for her, you see, dinner doesn't count."

"Why does she think I mightn't want to go on living here? Is she contemplating developments in my life? Or in her own? And where are you going to live while I'm living on the top of the hill, out of sight behind the wood? Did Margaret settle your future too, Judith?"

"I don't think it occurs to her that I've got one—except just to go on being here. We women—we ordinary women—get our futures settled for us. I think Bernadette settled mine the day she ran away and left poor Hilsey derelict."

He looked up at her with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Should you put the settling of your fate quite as early as that, Judith?"

She saw what he meant and shook her head at him in reproof, but her eyes were merry and happy.

"Have you thought over that idea of Switzerland in the winter?"

"It's the spring now. Why do you want to think of winter?"

"The thought of winter makes the spring even pleasanter." She smiled as she rested her hand on his shoulder and looked down on his face. "Well, perhaps—if I can possibly persuade Godfrey to come with us."

"If he won't? What are we to do if we can get nobody to go with us?"

She broke into a low gentle laugh. "Well, I don't want to get rusty in my skating. And it's splendid over there." Her eyes met his for a moment in gleeful confession. "Still—the best day's skating I ever had in my life, Arthur, was the first day we skated here at Hilsey."

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almost as much the story of David's mother as of David himself, and shows, against a background of the manners of the time, the consequences of a breaking away from the established order. How, under the shadow, David's childhood is yet almost wholly happy, and how on the threshold of manhood he is left ready—his heart's desire in view—to face life in earnest and to make a new name for himself in his own way, these pages tell.

THE KENNEDY PEOPLE. By W. Pett Ridge, Author of 'The Happy Recruit.'

The author is, in this novel, still faithful to London, but he sets out here to till something like fresh ground. A description is given of three generations of a family, and particulars are conveyed of the kind of chart that represented their advances and their retreats. The story is told in Mr. Pett Ridge's lively and characteristic manner.

Mr. GREX OF MONTE CARLO. By E. Phillips Oppenheim, Author of 'Master of Men.'

Mr. Oppenheim has never written a more absorbing story than this one, in which an adventurous young American first falls in love, then into trouble, and becomes a part of events that are making history.

In Monte Carlo three men skilled in international intrigue meet in secret conference; two Ministers of foreign affairs and a Grand Duke plan to make over the map of Europe, while a diplomat representing a fourth great world-power, aided by skilled secret-service men, aims to thwart their endeavours. Then—enter the American. How young Richard Lane, wealthy and used to having his own way, fell in love with mysterious Mr. Grex's daughter, how he was not discouraged even when he found out what an important personage Mr. Grex really was, how he took a hand in events and caused an upset, is told in a thrilling love story that lays bare the methods of modern international diplomatists and incidentally conveys a warning to America to arm herself against the possibilities of war.

THE EVIL DAY. By Lady Troubridge.

In this book Lady Troubridge abandons for the first time the study of the very young girl, to give us one of a woman of forty, who, until the story opens, has led a quiet, retired and domestic existence. Circumstances, however, bring the heroine face to face with modern life and its developments in their most vivid form, and she does not pass through the experience altogether unscathed.

THE SECRET SON. By Mrs. Henry Dudeney.

Mrs. Henry Dudeney's new novel is a delightful story of the Sussex Downs. Its types and characters are rustic, and in it comedy and tragedy are skilfully mingled by this most accomplished writer. The theme of the book is the relation between mother and son, and the reader passes to the close of a very human story with a most absorbing interest.

DEMI-ROYAL. By Ashton Hilliers, Author of 'The Adventures of a Lady of Quality.'

That the famous Mrs. Fitzherbert, legal and loyal wife of the Regent, *may* have borne him a child is indisputable. That she did so is the author's thesis in this diverting romance; and the fortunes of this child, legitimate, but un-royal, trepanned, lost, mourned as dead, repudiated, traced, acknowledged, are his theme. The mother-love of a noble woman, the fears of a selfish voluptuary, the self-sacrifice of honest York, form the warp across which runs the woof of a girl's life lived innocently and spiritedly in Puritan surroundings, watched over by the Order of Jesus, the unconscious centre of vehement antagonisms.

SOMETHING NEW. By P. G. Wodehouse, Author of 'The Little Nugget.'

The treatment of this story is farcical, but all the characters are drawn carefully as if it were a comedy. Ashe Marson, a struggling writer of adventure stories, sees an advertisement in a paper in which 'a young man of good appearance who is poor and reckless, is needed for a delicate and perilous enterprise.' Joan Valentine, the heroine, who has been many things in her time, also answers an advertisement requiring 'a woman to conduct a delicate and perilous enterprise.'

THE HIGHWAYMAN. By H. C. Bailey, Author of 'A Gentleman Adventurer.'

This is a story set in the last years of Queen Anne. Naturally, Jacobite and Hanoverian plots and conspirators furnish much of the incident. They are, however, only a background to the hero and heroine, whose love with its adventures and misadventures is the main subject of the novel. Though Marlborough and the Old Pretender, Queen Anne and other figures of history play their part, it is the hero and heroine who hold the centre of the stage.

THE YELLOW CLAW. By Sax Rohmer, Author of 'Dr. Fu-Manchu.'

This is an enthralling tale of Eastern mystery and crime in a European setting. The action moves

from an author's flat in Westminster to the 'Cave of the Golden Dragon,' Shadwell, and the weird Catacombs below the level of the Thames, and circles round 'Mr. King,' the sinister and unseen president of the Kan-Suh Opium Syndicate. We meet with the beautiful Eurasian, Mahâra, 'Our Lady of the Poppies,' and are introduced to M. Gaston Max, Europe's greatest criminologist, and to the beetle-like Chinaman, Ho-Pin.

THE OCEAN SLEUTH. By Maurice Drake.

This is an exciting story, by one of the most promising of the younger novelists, of perils by sea and criminal hunting by land. The tale begins with some exciting salvage while off the Cornish coast, and passes on to the allurements of detective work in England and Brittany. In Austin Voogdt, the hero, Mr. Drake has created a commanding figure in romance.

THE PERPETUAL CHOICE. By Constance Cotterell, Author of 'The Virgin and the Scales.'

The Perpetual Choice runs between poverty and wealth, passion and prejudice, London and the country, and is the story of a high-spirited girl. She has to discover the precariousness of housekeeping on enthusiasm with her strange friends, and finds that poverty is partly fun and partly a blight. Three men love her, all differently, and when she falls in love her crisis has come.

CHARLES QUANTRILL. By Evelyn Apted.

A story of quiet charm and of intense human interest. The interest of the book does not depend on sensational effects, but rather in the endeavour to apply insight and imagination to the faithful description of events and problems which might confront any one of its readers. The scene shifts at times from England to South Africa, Norway, and the Riviera. A perfectly natural sequence of events leads to the marriage of a girl of strong character with a man of principles less high than her own. The writer brings the story to a dramatic close about two years after the marriage.

LITTLE HEARTS. By Marjorie L. Pickthall.

A story of the Forest and the Downs in the troubled times of the eighteenth century, telling how Mr. Sampson, a gentleman engaged in the production of a Philosophy of Poverty, rescues and shelters one Anthony Oakshott, who is thrown from horseback over his wall, and whom he takes for an heroic Jacobite, much wanted by the King's men. By so doing he changes his own life and that of the girl he loves.

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