

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_210392

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 823 / 5657 Accession No. 20099

Author Smith Naomi: R.

Title Younger Venus.

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below.

1938

The Younger Venus

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Novels

The Tortoiseshell Cat
The Housemaid
Skin Deep
John Fanning's Legacy
Children in the Wood
Summer Holiday
The Island
The Delicate Situation
The Bridge
The Queen's Wigs
Jake
Ail Star Cast
For Us in the Dark
Miss Bendix

Short Stories

The Mother
The Lover
Incredible Tale
Madam Julia's Tale
David

A Private Anthology
Portrait of Mrs. Siddons
The Double Heart: A Study of
Julie de Lespinasse
The Balcony: A Play

The Younger Venus

A Tale by
Naomi Royde Smith

. . So full of shapes is Fancy
That it alone is high fantastical

London
Macmillan & Co. Ltd
1938

COPYRIGHT

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

FOR
RUTH AND HENRY HEAD
WHO ASKED FOR A HAPPIER TALE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS being an escape story, the plot, the characters and the forged, as well as the stolen, works of art in it are all my own invention.

I have to thank Mrs. Dod Proctor for telling me that her husband never made a Diaphaenicon of unicorns, and Mrs. Ruth Manning Sanders for allowing me to quote on pages 281-2 the child's poem about these creatures from her novel, *The Growing Trees*.

N. G. R. S.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	I
CHAPTER II	57
CHAPTER III	III
CHAPTER I V	181
CHAPTER V	203
CHAPTER V I	222
CHAPTER VII	235
CHAPTER VIII	275
CHAPTER I X	284
CHAPTER X	330
CHAPTER X I	338
CHAPTER XII	357

THE CHARACTERS

MRS. ADDERLEY, *a semi-widow*
 RITA ADDERLEY }, *her daughters*
 SUSAN ADDERLEY
 MORCOMB, *a lady's maid*
 BASIL WINTER, *her son by her first marriage to—*
 SIMON WINTER, *an amoral critic*
 A. X. FROME, *a writer*
 P. K. GAWKRODGER, *his servant*
 RIPLEY, *a gardener*
 MRS. RIPLEY, *his wife*
 ISAAC, *a cat*
 EMLIENNE WINTER, *Basil's wife*
 BARTOLOME WINTER, *their son, aged two*
 MARCEL LOMBART, *Emilienne's brother*
 PIERRE CHAPUISAT 1
 EDMOND CLAPAREDEJ } *Marc's friends*
 JOYCE WENTWORTH }
 THE ELMSLIE FAMILY } *winter-sporters*
 SIR CLAUD BAYNES

Time.—Pre-armament

Place.—More or less in the clouds

CHAPTER I

I

RITA was drawing on her new, large wash-leather gloves, one of a dozen pairs she had bought for the tour, when Mrs. Adderley, from among the hat-boxes and last-minute parcels in the back of the car, called :

" Wait a minute ! I believe I left the key in the lock of the dressing-room door."

Rita turned her head impatiently.

" Does it matter, Mother ? "

" Of course it does. We don't know the man from Adam."

" We don't know *anyone* from Adam."

Mrs. Adderley's habit of using *cliches* annoyed her elder child.

" All the same, Rita, I think I should like Susan to go back and make sure. The other keys are all in the small cash-box at the bottom of my suitcase. It went off with Morcomb this morning."

" If," said Susan, as she wriggled her way out of the low seat by the driver, " if you

hadn't sent Mrs. Ripley down to the gate . . ."

" Don't argue," said Rita, " and don't moon about having another last look. We've got to reach Southampton before six."

Susan nodded and took a long stride from the car to the terrace steps.

" As you *are* going," Mrs. Adderley called after the girl, " you might just look in the red chest where we put the photographs. I think I'd like to take the snapshot of Basil and Bartolome ; the one in the flat silver frame."

Rita set her teeth and drew a long inward breath. She had been ready to start ten minutes ago. Still, the delay would be her excuse for letting the Alvis out, once they had turned into the main road at the bottom of the hill, and tomorrow she'd be driving on that divine, straight, military road across Normandy, to Paris. No speed limit; no tiresome windings; no slithering down narrow lanes : just speed—speed ! Rita closed her eyes and let out her breath with a puff of joy.

" Happy, dear ? " asked Mrs. Adderley, from the back of the car. Rita turned and faced her mother.

" I'm going to be—*very*" she said.

The September sunlight lay in quiet patches across the hall, setting little discs of brightness

on the corners of the two oak chests and the Cromwellian table, and twinkling round the copper bowls and the blue stone jugs Mrs. Adderley had filled with beech leaves early that morning. Isaac, the marmalade cat, stood curved round the half-open door of the study and fixed a wide, green stare on some invisible presence Susan herself could almost see as she ran past. At the foot of the staircase she turned.

"It's all right, Isaac," she called. "Mr. Frome likes cats."

Isaac stretched his neck ; fixed his claws in the edge of the rug on the flagstones of the hall; bent his front knees backwards; drew his feathery tail from behind the edge of the study door and uttered the low, Persian trill he reserved for the occasions when human utterance moved him to reply.

" I don't believe you are the least bit sorry we are going away," said Susan.

But whatever—or whoever—it was Isaac had been watching, seemed to have gone out into the garden; foot by leisured foot he moved after the shadow till he reached the porch, where he took cover behind one of the white pillars that rose from the doorstep.

Susan went on; up the broad, shallow staircase leading through the centre of the house to a tall window from which the rose garden could be

seen. She knelt for a moment on the window-seat and looked down on the clipped hedges of the little maze beyond the rose beds. They were only four feet high these hedges ; it was years since she and Rita had been able to hide from one another in their tiny corners. The maze was a toy for children, planted seventy years ago by the bachelor uncle of a horde of nephews and nieces, many of whom had been far too big to get lost in it long before it had grown high enough to puzzle anybody. Now it was one of the curiosities of the neighbourhood. The house was named after it: Maze House. Everybody the Adderleys knew for miles around brought their week-end or summer visitors to see the maze, and every year on Susan's birthday they had a children's party of which it was the centre, even though Susan herself stood shoulder-high in it now, and had been nineteen in June. She wondered if Mr. Frome, who had taken Maze House for a year, were a bachelor uncle also and, if so, whether he would have children to stay and, perhaps, when he had got to know his neighbours and had heard about the June Party, if he would give one himself.

They had wondered a good deal about Mr. Frome during the past fortnight as they packed their clothes and cleared the drawers and wardrobes, and put away small treasures and odds-and-ends of no value to anyone but the owner,

like the things people lost and advertised for in the Agony Column. They had managed to crowd everything they did not want to leave about into their mother's dressing-room at the end of the passage on the left of the staircase as you came up: it opened out of the bedroom, and had been used by their father when he was alive. Mrs. Adderley had moved a wardrobe across the communicating door. This left her room and bathroom and the spare bedroom on one side of the house, and Rita's and Susan's rooms and the old nursery on the other, free for the tenant's use. Mrs. Adderley had wanted to close her own room, saying that three bedrooms were enough for any single man who said he was intending to devote himself to work; but Rita had been very firm and sensible with her mother about this.

" We don't *know* that he's a single man," she urged. " Mr. Vulliamy only said that he'd be coming by himself and would bring his own servants. He may have one of these child-wives who don't make their own arrangements."

" Perhaps she's a helpless invalid," Susan had suggested.

" No-one would bring a helpless invalid to a house at the top of a lane half-way up a hill and three miles from the village," said Mrs. Adderley. "He's coming for peace and quietness be-

cause he's writing a book. If there had been a Mrs. Frome, Mr. Vulliamy would have told me."

" Not in a typewritten and dictated letter if there's any mystery about her," said Rita. " Mr. Vulliamy is the soul of discretion. He doesn't disclose one client's horrible secrets to another. Do you suppose that this Mr. Frome has been told that you've had two husbands and three children and that your first husband is still alive ? "

" Really, Rita ! "

"*And* truly, Mother."

" I wonder what sort of art his book is about—the one he is going to write," said Susan.

" What I wonder is what his initials A. X. stand for," said Rita. " There are far too many A's and far too few X's to make a guess among."

" It sounds like algebra—A plus X. Algebra X. Frome."

" Albert Xerxes, I should think," said Rita.

" Arthur for A," said Susan, " and Xantippe after his mother."

" Or Arnold multiplied."

" Or just a misprint for A to Z."

" Or perhaps he was christened A. Kiss and feels ashamed of it now he's grown up, as I do about being really called Marguerite."

" We've forgotten Xenophon, Rita."

" That's too much like a horse."

" I like it. It sounds like a magician."

" Don't talk nonsense, Susan," said Mrs. Adderley. " Mr. Frome is an art critic, and we are far too busy to waste any more time on anything but getting the house ready to be left."

They were indeed far too busy to talk for long about anything but their arrangements for a year's absence from England.

It had been decided to close the house after the double wedding of the two sisters, who had been at Maze House as cook and house-parlour-maid for many years, and to go abroad for the next three months, visiting Basil Winter—Mrs. Adderley's son by her first marriage, who was in the League of Nations Secretariat at Geneva—and ending up with winter sports. Morcomb, who had graduated from the status of nurse to the little girls to that of lady's-maid, was to travel with them. And then Mr. Vulliamy, informed of the proposal and consulted about the financial side of it, had written to suggest that, if the Adderleys cared to prolong their holiday and ensure the proper care of the house while they were away, he could provide them with a quiet and careful tenant who was prepared to pay a good rent for a comfortable house in a really secluded part of the world.

It had seemed almost too good to be true.

" We can get in two lots of winter sports," said Rita.

" We can go to Italy," said Susan.

" Now, Susan," her mother had said when Mr. Vulliamy's final letter about the arrangement had arrived, " you'll not need to worry about leaving Isaac at the Lodge with Mrs. Ripley."

" He wouldn't stay there a minute, Mother. He hates Ripley."

" Cats always dislike gardeners," said Mrs. Adderley, as if this truth involved no mystery, " and Mr. Frome says he likes cats."

" What Susan means is that she doesn't like letting the house at all."

Rita's sisterly insight was keener than her sympathy with the unspoken reluctance she had diagnosed.

Mrs. Adderley had received this statement with a moment's dismay.

" I didn't know you felt like that about it, Susan," she said kindly. " It's hard to realise that, in another couple of years, the house will be legally yours. Would it make you feel any better if I let you have all the rent for pocket-money—when the taxes and expenses are paid, of course ? I shall put it aside for you in any case."

" No, Mother. I'd rather not have the money.

I don't mind so much, now that I know Isaac will stay here while we are away."

" I suppose you'll expect that cat to write every week to let you know how he is," said Rita.

Susan had felt that this was not the moment for confessing that she had given Mrs. Ripley a packet of foreign postcards, in order that she might have news of Isaac once a week. She thought of these as she ran along the white-panelled corridor and found the key sticking out of the lock of the dressing-room door where her mother had left it.

The air was still in the little closed room. The linen blind, drawn down over the window, let in a mellow haze from the morning outside, as though the day were already nearing sunset. Even the large bluebottle crawling on the wall seemed to be enjoying an afternoon leisure and paused to move his legs slowly over his iridescent wings. Susan knew she ought to try to chase him out; but the furniture was all pushed together under the dust-sheets, and by the time she had made a lane through it the fly would probably have retreated to the ceiling. Also, there was no time to spare : she had dawdled enough at the landing window already. Fortunately the Chinese wedding chest in which the photographs were kept stood by a table near the door. There was

no dust-sheet over it. Susan thought how odd it looked away from its proper companions, the Queen Anne screen and the lacquer cabinets and the rice-paper flower-paintings in the drawing-room. It looked so much redder here than it did downstairs, and the plants and insects, embossed in circles in its lid and sides, seemed to move as though life stirred in their gilded veins.

Susan knelt and drew out the ivory pin that locked the hasp. She remembered the cord that once tied it, and how, long ago, Rita in a hurry had snapped the frayed silk tassels and broken the cord and had been rather, but not very, sorry, saying that the silk was rotten anyway and the tassels dirty. They had thrown the broken cord into the fire and Susan had heard a faint hiss and had watched the strands swell and writhe over the coals as though ghosts of the silkworms who had spun them were re-shaping themselves as their work turned to ashes. She raised the lid and the breath of aromatic herbs, cut and dried a hundred years ago, escaped, a faint emanation from the woven lining of the box. Rita always laughed when Susan said she could smell the spicy odour ; it was, said Rita, nothing but dust in her nostrils and the scent of cloves from the Stickphast they used to mount the snapshots Basil's wife kept on sending to Basil's mother from Geneva.

As she knelt by the red-and-gold chest and lifted out the silver frames with the large photographs from Mrs. Adderley's writing-table, and the cases of miniatures they had decided not to leave hanging on either side of the drawing-room fireplace, the wraith-like scent floated out and hung in the stillness around her, delicate, perceptible, antique. She sniffed it in, wrinkling her nose in defiance of Rita's scepticism. Rita could smell only quite strong scents because she smoked so many cigarettes. Susan wondered whether she, too, would do the same when she was twenty-one.

A tiny sneeze broke in on this not very absorbing debate. Isaac had come up from the porch and was standing, his fore-paws on the edge of the chest, examining its contents with the resigned disapproval of one who has only himself to blame for believing for a moment that this receptacle might hold milk or mice.

"You don't like it, but you *can* smell it," said Susan, taking the snapshot of Basil's son in one hand and lifting Isaac to set him down on all-fours with the other. Before Susan had time to lay the passe-partout on the floor beside her in order to have both hands free for closing and fastening the chest, Isaac had jumped heavily on to her lap—and, as it sloped because Susan was kneeling, he fixed his claws into the mesh of

her knitted skirt and fell into determined slumber.

" Nice but silly," said Susan, rapping Isaac's paws with the ivory pin to make him loosen his grip of her new dress before she could shake him off. " I don't want to go away myself, but that makes no difference."

The cat rolled to the floor and Susan put out her hand to stroke him: but Isaac was offended; he moved away from her conciliatory fingers and, leaping to the table, once more eyed the contents of the still open chest, from a greater height this time.

In her search for the snapshot Susan had rearranged the other photographs, and now one of herself, taken that summer by Lenare, lay on the top of all the others. It was a full-plate picture, lightly framed in silver-grey wood, and showed her head and shoulders rising out of a shadowed vagueness characteristic of all the portraits made in that famous studio. The face looking straight out of the frame, turned slightly on the long neck as though the sitter had been walking away and a voice had called to her, a voice she would answer in a moment, when she had roused herself from some preoccupation of her own.

Isaac bent forward, crouching on the edge of the table, intent on what he saw. It was probably only some gleam on the surface of the glass over

the photograph that held him in the rigid pose of a cat about to spring: but something in his taut, familiar attitude roused in Susan all the homesickness she had been suppressing ever since the holiday they had planned for so long had passed from the state of improbability to that of a scheme in process of realisation. In a loyal effort to assure herself that she was really almost as pleased as Rita and her mother were at the prospect of so much delightful travel, Susan transferred her own reluctance to share this pleasure to Isaac, giving him credit for understanding and regret.

" Poor Isaac," she said as she lifted her photograph from the chest. " You shall have my picture to remember me by while I am away."

Her voice in the stillness sounded louder than she had meant to speak. As she fastened the chest it seemed to her that a listener, other than Isaac and more attentive, had heard her. She had been aware of this invisible presence in the silent house ever since she had crossed the hall five minutes ago—and yet she knew that no-one was there, since Mrs. Ripley, who was to hand over the keys to the newcomer that afternoon, had gone down the drive to make sure that the gates were open, and the temporary housemaid had left in the station taxi with Morcomb directly after breakfast.

A sense of guilt, which she put down to the pretence that Isaac wanted her photograph, stirred remotely among her more immediate thoughts as she fastened the chest; carried the resisting Isaac out into the landing ; turned the key in the door and put it in her handbag together with the snapshot for her mother. She went along the corridor still holding the frame in her hand. Before she reached the staircase she heard the hoarse whirring sound made by the grandfather clock in the hall to indicate that it was assembling its forces and would, in due course, strike the hour.

" That's eleven," said Susan, and began to run. Half-way down the stairs, mingling with the quavering strokes of the clock, there came the sound of Rita's horn from the drive. There was no time to go back and put her photograph away. She didn't want to leave it on the table in the hall between the post-box and the wooden trough that held the local maps and time-tables : she couldn't take it, all unpacked, in the car, even if it were possible to explain to Rita why she had brought it with her. She didn't *want* to take it with her : she wanted to leave it behind. It had stood in the drawing-room, one of the great company of important-looking effigies Mrs. Adderley liked to have there; but the rest of the crowd were all locked up together in the

lacquer chest and Susan did not want to leave herself, alone of her generation, under the water-colour drawings of her father's great-aunts and the aquatints of the Irish coast.

For a second she thought she might set it on the glass lid of the silver table by the drawing-room door to watch over the things inside—so few of them silver—the ivory fan that had belonged to her father's grandmother; the snuff-boxes which had been part of a collection made by the Uncle Adderley who had built Maze House and planted the maze, and, most precious of them all to Susan herself, the little flat pin with a golden head of two stags seated together on a sort of nest of pineapple leaves which she had found, long ago, inside the lining of a doll's dress at the bottom of a box of toys that her mother had played with as a child. Susan always remembered her mother's surprise, almost as if she had been frightened, when this lovely find had come to light. They had taken it away from her, saying she might hurt herself with the pointed shaft that wobbled in its head ; but she had cried so much at losing sight of the pin that they had to promise to let her have it to play with when she went down to the drawing-room for the hour between nursery tea and bedtime. It had been kept ever since in one corner of the silver table. Susan did not want

to leave her new grown-up photograph near this reminder of her babyhood : she looked out from the frame towards the future, not backwards to the past.

She was downstairs now. She must put the thing *somewhere*. Her long legs carried her in two leaps across the hall and into the study. Before the clock had uttered its eleventh and hoarsest note she had propped the frame on the writing-table between the windows and was out again, running along the terrace towards the waiting car.

2

The colour of the highway had risen from the rose-madder of the Devon lanes through the old brick red of Somerset to the paler surfaces of Dorset and was already gilded by Hampshire sand before Rita yielded to her mother's cries of famine and thirst, coupled with the sinking level of the petrol gauge, and pulled up for tea. They had lunched on sandwiches and black coffee out of a thermos, sitting on a sunny bank in Cranborne Chase. Susan had wanted to stay there all afternoon, her back against the trunk of a hawthorn tree, watching the shadows as they moved with the turning earth through the day's journey. She dared not say so and, things being as they

were, she was glad that Rita had allowed half an hour only for this respite. The dream into which she could always enter, so long as she had not to watch the road map and look out for signposts, was broken ; but, if Rita kept to her plan of going through Tollard Royal and Ringwood and did not have one of her sudden ideas that the longer route by the wider road would be quicker in the end, she might recapture it before they reached the forest. She had hated motoring until she discovered that, by fixing her eyes on the most distant point ahead of the car, she could free her attention from those exasperating glimpses of woods, gardens, cottages, lanes and by-ways where it would be so good to stop for an hour, a day, perhaps for ever, and could let her mind return to contemplations of its own choosing. Sometimes these took the form of a story she told to herself ; sometimes she fished in the pools of memory for a half-forgotten poem. In Wales, last year, she had dredged the whole of *Lycidas* from the depths into which it had sunk since the last term at Southernwood when the long July mornings in the garden of that famous school had been filled with images of every flower that sad embroidery wears, even on days when the classes had been on other subjects than English literature.

Today she had dreamed neither a story nor a

poem, though once or twice the chorus that complains:—

*Thou hast fed one rose with dust of many men;
Thou hast marred one face with fire of many
tears_y*

murmured under the self-indulgence of her youthful melancholy.

Neither her mother nor Rita had asked her why she had been so long over her errand. Indeed she had herself been surprised to discover, as she settled back in her seat, that what had seemed so full an experience had crowded itself into no more than seven minutes. As she thought of them, the sights, the scents, the actions of that pause in time, unfolded and grew, like the flowers and fishes of dried pith children shake out of little Japanese envelopes into finger-bowls of tepid water where they float and blossom and take on strange shapes and clear colours and are part of the magic of Christmas or birthday.

The whole of Maze House, even the rooms she had not re-entered on her last flight through its beloved walls, built itself in her mind's eye: each room, each staircase and passage lit with fixed and brilliant illumination as though painted on the interiors of those Dutch boxes in which the cherished dwellings of men and women, dead these three hundred years, still remain

fresh and tended for the possible revisiting of unforgetting shades.

The coincidence which had emptied the house of any living creature but herself, while leaving door and window open to the morning, had filled it for her with a life whose manifestations had, till now, been stifled by the noise and chatter of half a score of inhabitants: housemaids; nurses; a governess; school friends; her mother's guests; the servants' relatives ; plumbers ; painters and paperhangers; the doctor, laying cool fingers on a feverish wrist in the night nursery ; the vicar, a thin blackness in the drawing-room at tea-time ; her half-brother Basil, still unmarried, with the unmentioned, possibly the unmentionable, shadow of his own father, but not hers or Rita's, arriving with him and waiting for his departure at the end of the school holidays ; of the Long Vacation ; of the shorter, less frequent visits he had paid them lately. All these figures danced in a progress along the hall and out of the doors, into the garden ; the drive ; the yard ; and through the drawing-room window on to the terrace where the steps led down to the rose beds and the maze at the back of the house, leaving her alone with something, with somebody. . . .

Isaac had seen it, this presence which grew more real to her with every mile that stretched between her and the place where she had had no

time to wait for it to declare itself. Was it, she wondered, her own ghost left behind in the home she could not bear to leave ? Had she really left a part, a shadow of herself, at home, and been conscious of this emanation, as Shelley had been of his own ghost on the night before he died ? Would she go through the long months before they came back only half alive to all the new scenes and faces because of the increasing brightness in which the immediate past had steeped her memory of it; because her whole heart had not come away from the place she loved ?

Why had she taken her own photograph out of its aromatic hiding-place and set it up, the only picture of any living person left in the ordered, shining rooms ? Not for Isaac : high though she knew his intelligence to be, Isaac had too much sense of his own to pretend that one photograph differed from another in a world peopled by creatures who moved about and could be stalked, if not captured, when he had a mind to chase. She told herself that she had obeyed a silly impulse ; that she had left her picture to watch over her home till she came back to it; that she had not told Rita what she had done because, in the first place, Rita was far too much occupied in driving to listen to such nonsense, and also because it was nonsense and

Rita would have laughed at her for it. The questioner in this duologue with herself then took a more searching line. If it was just to watch, why had she not propped the frame up in the old nursery bookcase—or on the dressing-table in her own white-and-green bedroom? Why had she taken it downstairs to the study? The answer she found to this question was so preposterous, so crammed with abashment, that, as she admitted its truth, she could feel a slow blush of surprise creeping from her cheeks to her forehead and spreading hotly down to her chin and neck. For one dizzy moment she felt she was going to ask Rita to turn back so that she might annul her foolishness; but before she could speak Mrs. Adderley called again from the back of the car:

"Rita, it's not much after four o'clock. We can perfectly well stop for tea at Romsey."

Only four o'clock! Five hours had slipped away, five hours of miles now separated her from the room where already the stranger, whose approaching spirit she had felt preceding him into the house he was to occupy, would have entered the study and seen the welcome she had offered him. She, who had been so unwilling that anyone should live, even for a year, in the house that was to be her own, as the house now let to strangers in Hertford Square was Rita's, had, in

five short minutes, become so completely reassured of the invading spirit's friendliness that she had made this absurd gesture towards a man of whom she knew no more than his surname.

3

Mr. Frome had exchanged no letters with Mrs. Adderley. All the arrangements with him had been made through Mr. Vulliamy. Knowing his client, the lawyer had said, quite firmly, from the outset that it would be far wiser not to complicate matters by putting Mrs. Adderley into direct communication with her tenant, lest she should make concessions or impose last-thought conditions of which he would probably be left uninformed.

Mrs. Adderley was vague and impulsive at the best of times. Mr. Vulliamy had not forgotten the fine muddle she had made of letting the town house after her husband's death. In the confusions and excitements of preparing for a long holiday with her two children there was no knowing what foolish impulse might not prompt her to send Mr. Frome a succession of those contradictory postcards, the arrival of which during any crisis in her affairs Mr. Vulliamy had schooled himself to ignore. Charming widows were, in the family solicitor's opinion,

worse than the fiercer type of this troublesome class. A widow who knew what she wanted, was, even when unreasonable, usually quite definite; but a widow who looked ridiculously young for her age, who was often taken in by unscrupulous people whom she never wanted to bring to book, and who was always ready to modify an agreement after it had been signed and sealed, ought never, in Mr. Vulliamy's opinion, to be put in control of anything but her own dress allowance.

All the same, if Mr. Vulliamy's heart could be said to have anything in the nature of a soft spot, this weakness manifested itself towards Mrs. Adderley. He had known her since childhood, and had done his best, when she was a girl of twenty, to persuade her against marrying Simon Winter, not only because Winter had no settled income, but because the young art critic was even then regarded as erratic in his judgment and suspiciously lucky in some of his finds. When, fifteen months later, Madge Winter, now mother of a son, had come to him in a state more of confusion than distress because Simon had asked her to give him his freedom, Mr. Vulliamy had barely refrained from saying he had told her as much. She was too young to be in such trouble. Silly though he thought her, he could not help admiring the complete lack of vindictiveness with which she had explained that there seemed

to be another woman and that Simon thought this person more suited to his nature than she herself was. Whether this optimism were justified no-one had an opportunity of learning. The divorce went through its customary stages—petition ; decree nisi; decree absolute ; but it was the petitioner and not the respondent who took advantage of the ultimate freedom obtained by both parties.

Mrs. Simon Winter, who had a small private income, very sensibly went abroad with her infant son, and lived quietly in Switzerland for some years. On the outbreak of war she returned to England, qualified for V.A.D. work, and married a young officer whom she nursed in Boulogne in 1916. Captain Adderley was killed in a motoring accident when Susan was eight years old. He left a comfortable income and two houses to his wife and children. Mr. Vulliamy, who had arranged the marriage settlement, found himself trustee and guardian of an estate which, even when allowance was made for Mrs. Adderley's vagaries, gave him very little trouble.

Basil Winter, seven years older than his half-sister Rita, was brought up with her and Susan at Maze House and was not told, until he went from his preparatory school to Rugby, that his own father was still alive. The boy had not been unduly distressed by the news. Later, after he

had left Oxford, he went to Mr. Vulliamy for confirmation of his hope that the Simon Winter whose discovery of certain Celtic manuscripts in a private library in St. Gall had been the centre of a spirited discussion, not only in the archaeological world but, even more acrimoniously, in the correspondence columns of *The Times*, was the father he had never seen. Young Winter made himself known to the brilliant but erratic scholar and spent an agreeable evening having dinner with him at the Oriental Club.

Mrs. Adderley had taken the news of this meeting with a characteristic mixture of acceptance and protest.

"Of course, Basil/' she had said, "I am really very glad this has happened, but I do hope you won't say anything to the girls about it, for Rita's sake."

"Why specially for Rita's ? "

"Oh, Susan doesn't realise it. But when I told Rita that you had a separate father of your own, after I'd told you, she was *far* too much interested. She seemed to think that your father was the same sort of relation to her that hers was to you—and of course that's nonsense."

"I'm not sure she's not right."

"Oh no, Basil. It doesn't work backwards."

"It seems to be working *forwards* now."

"Only for you. I can't deny that Simon was

your father, at the time. But he never took any interest in you when you were a baby. The only *real* father you knew was George."

" Do you mean that he never paid for my upbringing ? Didn't you have alimony ? "

" No, Basil. I had enough money of my own and I wanted Simon to be quite free."

" You know, Mother, you did very well by me in the matter of a stepfather."

" You always called George, Daddy. Rita and Susan couldn't possibly call Simon anything but Professor Winter if they were to meet him, which is impossible. What do *you* call him, Basil ? "

" Professor Winter. I've only seen him once."

" Well, you see ! "

Basil, who was inured to his mother's tangential methods of what she thought was argument, said :

" I suppose his wife would be my stepmother. Is she still alive ? "

" He never had a wife, after I divorced him."

" But, Mother ..."

" Of course," said Mrs. Winter, " there was some sort of co-respondent, because of the Law ; but only a temporary one, for my sake."

" You mean it was you who wanted to marry someone else ? "

" Not in the least, Basil. I did not meet Rita's

and Susan's father until long after I had divorced Simon. You know that. Cruelty wasn't enough, or desertion. Simon was very kind and he never deserted me."

" But, Mother !——"

" Simon was always perfectly charming to me and he only went to Prague, just before you were born, because his expert opinion had been wanted over the Theodora jewel. When he was put in prison, he naturally couldn't come home at once."

" Put into prison, was he ? "

" Well, Basil, the jewel disappeared."

" Before my father went to Prague ? "

"No, dear. It was never found, although his luggage was searched. There was quite a stir about it. The Ambassador got him released, without a stain on his character; but he was advised not to come back to England just then. So when Morcomb showed me a great many coloured stones she'd found in the hem of one of his pyjama jackets and he wouldn't let me send them back again, it seemed better to get a divorce. The setting had reached America by that time."

" He confessed ? "

" Not confessed, exactly. It was all rather complicated. There had been another little fuss over some manuscript he'd helped a dealer to

sell—so I didn't feel I was quite the right wife for him. The strain was a little trying, you know, even if I couldn't have been made to give evidence. So he went to San Francisco and didn't send me any money—not that I needed it—only hotel bills for Mr. and Mrs. Winter, which made it quite simple."

" Quite ! And I gather he's been carrying on in much the same way ever since."

" He's been made a Professor of some foreign University and his books seem to be well advertised. That's all I know about him. But every time there's a fuss about any picture or old book or anything of that kind, I feel he is probably at the bottom of it, especially as being called Professor sounds so respectable."

" It doesn't sound very English," said Basil. " All the same, he wrote two quite admirable letters about those pages from a Celtic missal, just after Christmas. It was reading them that made me look him up."

" Yes, Basil. And I dare say he had hidden the other pages somewhere, and then he'll discover them himself."

" If they exist—which seems doubtful."

" He could have them made, very cleverly," said Mrs. Adderley, as if the forging of ancient missals were only a matter of skill.

" You know, Mother," said Basil, " I'm glad

you've told me, and not at all sorry I've met him. He's a very good companion and some of his deals and discoveries are perfectly genuine. But I do see why Rita and Susan had better not know I've made his acquaintance."

" When I used to argue with him he said that when he was up against scoundrels he had to use their methods and that it was all very much like hunting or war. You had to trick your enemy, or your quarry, for the fun of it. I didn't feel I should enjoy that sort of fun myself. I was rather sorry I had found out."

" Do people know about this ? "

" I've never told anyone else, but I shouldn't like you to believe that your father had been unfaithful to me."

" I suppose," said Basil, with the omniscience of the young, " any woman would prefer that her husband should smuggle art treasures than—well—have other women in his life."

" If," said Mrs. Adderley, becoming unusually definite, " if there had been other women I should have closed my eyes, though I might not have been quite so pleased to see him when he came back ; but nobody can close their eyes to rubies and amethysts."

" Old Vulliamy told me it was other—or one other woman, when I asked him."

" Legally there had to be, so of course there

was. Mr. Vulliamy didn't ask me for my real reason. Besides, I shouldn't have told him. I didn't want Simon to get into trouble."

" You were only a kid yourself."

" I was twenty-one."

" And he left you with me—and never bothered to try to see me."

" I made that a condition. He would have set you such a bad example, Basil. I didn't want to have fusses with you."

" Good old George saw to that."

" George was always a very great comfort," said Mrs. Adderley with an approval so mild that it might have made an older man than Basil wonder how far the admitted success of her second marriage had stifled regret for the disaster to her first.

Simon Winter's son not only kept the promise he had implicitly made to his mother ; he never reopened the subject with her again. He saw his father from time to time in London and later in Paris, but he was careful not to let any news of these meetings reach Maze House. The interest he took in his father presently gave way to that inspired in him by the daughter of a Genevese banker whom he met while he was obtaining a grip of spoken French with a family living at Versailles. The young woman was the daughter

of a Swiss widow with whom Mrs. Adderley had renewed a schoolgirl friendship during her stay in Switzerland : it was therefore quite easy for Basil to improve the acquaintance when he obtained his appointment in Geneva. When, in due course, he married Mademoiselle Emilienne Lombart he was wary enough to arrange that the wedding should take place at a time when Professor Winter had accepted a commission to purchase and transport Coromandel screens for a millionaire's palace on Long Island and had disappeared into the Far East.

On his return to Europe, Simon Winter, having business in Lausanne, paid a flying visit to Geneva one afternoon and called on his son. Finding that the young Winters' sumptuous new flat in the route de Malagnou had been furnished almost entirely in chromium-plated tube-work and that his daughter-in-law's taste forbade the introduction of ornament or picture into the carefully balanced scheme of vacancy designed for her by the youngest and most fashionable decorator in Geneva, Simon Winter gave the young couple his blessing and left by the night express for Paris. Some weeks later he ran down, in the Fulham Road, an immense baroque painting of the *Translation of Elijah* and ordered an extremely curly pseudo-Venetian frame to be constructed for this treasure. The result achieved

gave him satisfaction. On the eve of his next departure for the States, he caused the assemblage to be forwarded, subject to duty on arrival, as his wedding gift to his son and his daughter-in-law.

This monstrous offering was delivered at the flat in the route de Malagnou on the afternoon which had seen Emilienne Winter's removal to the nursing-home where, a few days later, her first child was born. Basil was too anxious before the birth of his son, and too busy admiring Emilienne and adoring the infant after it, to tell his wife about the tall, narrow crate which had been sent down to the store-room in the basement until such time as she should be home again and able to attend to the disposal of its contents herself. He also forgot to show his wife the cryptic letter Simon had written referring to his own cosmopolitan itinerary for the coming year, and to the little gift which would, he hoped, keep the thought of him in Basil's and Emilienne's minds until he could have the satisfaction of seeing where they had placed it in their delightful home.

Six months later Emilienne discovered the crate. When its contents were disclosed, she had no difficulty persuading Basil to offer it to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire : but the learned director of that admirable collection, after one

horrified glance at the picture, emerged from the basement and, in a dazed voice, asked whether Professor Winter had actually committed himself to the opinion that his gift was the genuine work of Lo Spagnoletto whose signature it bore.

" My father is more of an archaeologist than an art critic," said Basil with rather strangled loyalty.

" Ah ! Je m'en souviens, *Incunabula du neuvième siècle*, oeuvre remarquable—tres remarquable," said the director and took a hurried and embarrassed leave of the young couple.

" We can be well assured of one thing," said Emilienne in her precise English, " the intention of your father to keep himself remembered by us is entirely accomplished."

Basil recalled, not without sympathy, that his mother had based her reason for divorcing Simon on his idea of fun.

" He makes very expensive jokes sometimes," he said.

" For himself—and for others," said Emilienne. " How much duty did you pay on this horror ? "

" I forget."

" At least we are spared the effort to thank him for it," said Emilienne, who was a sensible girl, " as you have no address for him since a year now."

" We can wait till he turns up and asks to see it."

" He may never return," said Emilienne optimistically, " and meanwhile there is no need to speak of it to Maman. She has not yet learnt that your father paid us his visit of congratulation."

" In that case Elijah had better remain in the basement."

" That is what I intend, my Basil."

So the picture was left in the store-room, where it frightened the concierge's little boy into screaming fits every time the store-room door was opened and he could slip in and get himself thoroughly terrified by it. Hearing of these crises, Basil made no protest against his wife's refusal to hang Elijah in the flat.

Bartolome Winter, aged four and a half months, was, according to his parents, so observant and sensitive a child that the mere thought of confronting him with the prophet swirling to heaven among the trampling hoofs and snorting nostrils of the quadriga of horses attached to the chariot of fire, made his young father shudder. Emilienne, though she laughed at Basil's fears, was not sorry to have her own determination to keep the picture out of sight reinforced in this way. After a week or two they ceased to speak or even to think about it.

The only person who got permanent enjoyment from its existence was young Marcel Lombart, Emilienne's brother, at that time president of the Societe de Zofingue, an ancient brotherhood of University students who wore white round caps with red and white bands above the black eye-shades, and narrow red-and-white bandoliers to match. The members of this society considered themselves not to be only the salt but also the cream of the earth. Having seen the picture and heard how Basil had tried to present it to the Swiss nation, Marcel added a visit to Elijah to the list of initiatory trials undergone by candidates for admission to the brotherhood.

" Either one laughs or one weeps when it is known that this work has been refused by Helvetia. Thus the taste and judgment of the candidate is established. Some, it is true, are unmoved. These are without sensibility. For them penalties are reserved."

Emilienne, as a married woman and the mother of a son, had grown out of her girlish curiosity concerning all that passed behind the closed doors of the brotherhood to which the young men she had envied and admired from childhood belonged, so she did not enquire what these penalties might be.

" All I ask of you, Marcel," she said, " is

that you will cease the pleasantries about Elijah and his chariot when Basil's mother is here."

" She comes alone ? " asked Marcel with a brassy smile.

" This time," said Emilienne with a sister's insight, " there will be two of them."

" Maman has not warned one of this complication."

" I was not sure of this till yesterday. I have not yet seen Susan myself," said Emilienne ; " she did not come to our wedding, as there was an outbreak of *la grippe* at her boarding-school that year."

" In four years she has had time to recover."

" Three and a half years, Marcel."

" You have room for this crowd here ? "

" There are two guest-rooms, as you know very well. It will be useless to persuade Maman to invite Rita to the rue Monnetier."

" Also, if I gave her the idea, she would invite Madame Adderley."

" What you can do," said Emilienne, " is to arrange for tennis and excursions with Remy Bovet and Edmond Claparede. I shall give a *tht dansant* when everyone is back from the mountains, and Basil can bring all his young English, with their autos."

" They have no *voitures*—these sisters-in-law ? "

" Only one," said Emilienne.

" Which Rita conducts herself. I know that. There will be interruption of my studies."

Emilienne took no notice of this absurd remark, and presently Marcel went off to the Hotel Lombart in the rue Monnetier where he lived with his widowed mother, who was, as he very well knew, quite anxious for him to marry. She wanted an excuse for giving up the town house to her son and his bride and devoting herself to the care of the beautiful gardens of the Villa Lombart at Lancy, where it was her dream to live all the year round and keep open house for her children and the many grandchildren and great grandchildren she intended to see before she died. Emilienne had married young, and Marcel, having finished his military service, was in her opinion almost ripe for marriage too.

Madame Lombart's taste and principles had been formed in the nineteenth century by a mother who was rigidly conventional and, even in her own days, had been regarded as a survival from the generations which had invented the labyrinthine code of polite behaviour and the unwritten, but no less binding, law of forbidden degrees which governed family life and the inter-marriages in the closed circle of Genevese society. The Lombarts, the Courtois, the de la Treilles and their co-sanguineous branches pro-

D

vided the fields in which the young of each generation could, and did for many years, find their mates. With the passage of time the maintenance of this custom narrowed the choice down to an interlacing cousinship, as close and almost as difficult to break through as that of the European Royal Houses. Madame Lombart herself had been a de la Treille, and had dutifully married Bartolome Lombart while believing herself in love with a brilliant but plebeian young engineer whose experiments with dirigible balloons had been the sensation of their day in the years before the war. The marriage had turned out well enough, but, after her husband's death, she had allowed her children a liberty which would have made her own mother turn in her grave and had offered only the very mildest objection to Emilienne's choice of the young Englishman who spoke French so beautifully and was so highly placed in the Secretariat of the League of Nations.

" Je voudrais que mes enfants fassent des manages d'amour," had been her reply to the remonstrances of the various Lombarts and de la Treilles who had singled out the richest of the Courtois sons as the only possible match for Bartolome Lombart's heiress.

Emilienne, having profited by her mother's unadmitted regret for her own lost romance,

developed an atavistic strain with regard to her brother's matrimonial future. It was she who reported to her mother that, though Basil would only inherit part of his mother's quite moderate fortune, Rita—who had been one of her bridesmaids—was already richer than her half-brother, and would eventually be really well off.

" She is so much more amusing than Laure de la Treille, as well as being chic and pretty. Besides, it is so out of date to marry a cousin, and Laure is older than Marcel," she argued.

" Marcel cannot marry for the next two years, Emilienne, and before everything I counsel you not to speak to him of this project. It will turn him against the young person if you show what is in your mind."

" They made a very nice couple at the wedding—you admit it, Maman. I shall ask her to stay with me—for Basil's sake."

" Provided that she has not already betrothed herself to an Englishman," said Madame Lombart hopefully. In principle she desired Marcel to marry young, but she did not want to be parted from her son just yet.

Rita's visit to the young couple had, however, coincided with Marcel's short but alarming infatuation for a young Russian who was studying at the Ecole de Chimie. Rita herself had far too many strings to her bow among the cosmo-

politan group of Basil's friends and acquaintances to take much notice of the handsome but rather sulky youth with whom she danced and played tennis on the few occasions when he could be persuaded to help Emilienne to entertain her guest. But, when Rita had gone back to England, and his affair with the Russian student had reached a stormy and exhausting climax, Marcel, who had inherited the shrewdness of the international bankers from whom he descended, began to think favourably of his sister's pretty bridesmaid who would be quite rich one day. The English did not make scenes. It was chic to have an English wife. Other things being equal, he would like to marry to please his mother.

In spite of the tact and resource with which Madame Lombart believed she had refrained from dropping any hints, and possibly because of Emilienne's rather off-hand references to her sister-in-law, Marcel knew perfectly well what was in their minds. The birth of Bartolome had eclipsed all other themes for some months, but, now that the youngster could walk and was beginning to address short remarks in Anglo-Swiss to the world, it was quite natural that the English grandmother should come out to behold the child. Though Emilienne had been careful not to tell her brother definitely that

Mrs. Adderley was bringing anyone else with her, Marcel was none the less aware that he was to be given a second chance. The news that Rita's younger sister would come too did not interest him much. He found very young girls tiresome. Rita was only a few months younger than himself—nearly twenty-three, a ripe age. He would explain to Edmond Claparede that the younger Miss Adderley was the one he must dance with and take out in his sports car. Claparede was working at English : he would be glad of the occasion to speak this useful language every day for the next six weeks.

This was the situation towards which Madge Adderley and her daughters were travelling with no suspicion of the various entanglements so soon to complicate their lives.

4

At six o'clock Morcomb brought a tray with two thick white cups of strong tea into the cabin.

" We've sighted land," she announced as triumphantly as if she were Christopher Columbus, " and the sea's everser calm."

" It's no use saying that, Morcomb," said Rita. " I lie flat until the good ship berths. You

go and encourage Mother. Susan got up hours ago."

"Your mother's had a bad crossing. I shall let her lay till the last moment. The sea's as flat as a pancake, Miss Rita. You'll need to be up and dressed to see the car off the boat."

Rita took no notice of this superfluous threat. The car would be landed without any intervention on her part; she did not intend to stir until the engines had ceased that appalling throb-throb which was quite as bad as the travelling movement of the boat. Her mother, from long experience, had learnt that, as she must be seasick, even on the shortest daylight crossing, it was better to suffer this indignity by night and in the seclusion of a stateroom where she could go to bed properly and get up at leisure. She was always the last person off the boat after any Channel passage. Rita, who was a bad sailor herself, took advantage of her mother's superior infirmity to be as lazy as she could, even when, as this time, the crossing had been so smooth that she had slept through it.

Susan had slept too ; but not so long or so well as her sister. She was a good sailor and would have liked to stay on deck all night, but this idea had been badly received by Morcomb. She had charge of such rugs and cushions as the party had taken with them and did not

propose to unstrap them till they passed through the Customs at Havre, if then. Susan had abandoned her night watch.

As she sat in the narrow cabin, brushing out the coils of her long honey-coloured hair, she envied the freedom Rita's short dark curls gave her from this nightly task. She herself was a prisoner like Rapunzel, but in a ship instead of a tower, where the only voice that called to her was that of a seabird, lured by the ship's light from the cliffs where its wiser companions were taking their rest.

" If I were to let my hair blow out of the port-hole/' said Susan, as she tugged with a comb at the heavy tresses, " I might catch that bird in it."

" If you did anything so silly," said Rita from her berth, " you'd have to get Morcomb in to disentangle it and she'd say * a bird in the hand is worth two in the brush.' "

" Oh ! " said Susan, " I didn't know I'd said it aloud."

" You're talkin' your sleep, Susan. You've been half asleep all day. Do up your plaits and put out the light. I want to get quite to sleep myself if I'm to drive tomorrow."

" Sorry, Rita."

Susan pulled the two long plaits forward over her shoulders and, kneeling on the cabin

floor, laid her cheek against her sister's on the flat white pillow.

" Good night. Sleep well. Dream sweet/" she said.

It was the nursery ritual they had never omitted since Susan had been able to repeat it.

" Good night, darling," murmured Rita, " and do try to dream sensibly if you can."

Dream sensibly ! Susan, knowing too well how far from sensible her long day-dream had been, lay in the darkened cabin and heard the rustle of the water as it was broken around the passage of the sounding ship that drew a trail of foam behind it, measuring the distance that increased all night long between her and the dream she had left behind and was yet taking with her. Every other thought she could hold for a moment as it touched her fancy made a little shield to hide behind; but each fancy dissolved in mist before the steady sunshine that lay over the scene where that dream had caught her. Rapunzel in her tower, letting down her cloudy hair to make a rope by which the singer, wandering in the garden below, might climb to her window; sea-gulls caught by night in the wind-blown plaits through a port-hole ; the chorus from *Atalanta in Calydon* she had dredged up from memory that afternoon ; pictures of the soft ball of yellow fur that had been Isaac in his

blue-eyed infancy—all these had come and gone, though she had tried to hold them, and in vanishing had left the vision of the empty house, empty no longer, dear and bright and alive with a coming sequel to the thing she had done, not in a dream, but knowingly, impelled by an impulse she did not regret.

Gradually, veil by veil, sleep crept upon her and she dreamed, first of being shut in darkness and then of being something small and smooth and round held close in the darkness, and then that the darkness grew luminous, pale at first and then flushed with rose and green and palest violet over a milk-white opacity, and she knew she was a pearl in its nacreous shell, lit by the sea-dimmed radiance of sunlight on the water. She laughed in her sleep and was awakened by her own laughter. The white walls of the cabin were rosy; from the open port-hole the reflection of waves moved against the gleaming panels. Sitting up in her berth she saw the eastern sky streaked with all the colours of that mother-of-pearl in which she had thought herself cradled. The glassy sea was still dark with the night that lingered overhead; but in the east, above the scarves of mists that lay along the horizon, there gleamed a curved thread of faintest gold, the last hour's edge of the revolving moon.

The ship began to turn in her course. In a

few moments the east would be invisible from the cabin; soon the dipping horizon would swing down before the sun and the vanishing moon would go out with every late pale star now hanging in the zenith.

Susan climbed down from her berth and put her clothes on in haste.

" What are you doing ? " Rita asked sleepily. " It's not morning yet."

" The old moon's setting in the sunrise," said Susan, and was gone.

For half an hour she had the deck to herself, and leaning on the forward rail she was carried, as a figurehead alone on the water, the dawn winds moving around her, stirring the folds of her long woollen coat and brushing against the plaits of her yellow hair.

The dawn brightened from sunrise to morning and other passengers came from their cabins to breathe the sweet air. There was a stirring below ; the sound of cups set briskly on their saucers ; the tinkle of spoons ; the scent of hot coffee came up from the saloon. For the first time since they had set off on their journey Susan felt the deliciousness of going abroad again and hoped, as she went down the companion, that flat white slabs of not very sweet sugar would be served with the coffee which smelt so authentically French. Beet sugar, not cane sugar, was the

first sign that you had left England. In another hour all the advertisement placards would be in French, and the mysterious words, " Societe Anonyme," would be displayed on hoardings along the highway.

Not only was the sugar flat and crumbly but the bread was rolls and the butter was piled in thin grooved curls on small blocks of ice. Susan felt quite sorry for two English women who were asking for China tea and sausages at the marble-topped bar where she drank her own coffee. She felt both experienced and content, always a comforting state.

Even the realisation that she had left her purse in the cabin on deck did not make her feel at all foolish. She explained to the steward and, as there were only half a dozen other breakfasters in the saloon, he was not in the least alarmed when the young lady (she was clearly a girl on her way back to school, with those two plaits hanging down over her shoulders) went off to fetch money, or a travelling companion, to pay for her breakfast.

Thinking to shorten her way to the cabin, Susan did not go up the main staircase when she left the saloon, but made for a narrower one, and, missing her way, found herself emerging on to an upper deck. The sun was high by this time and a current of air blew one of her plaits

across her face as she came into the open, obliging her to stand still for a moment in order to see where she was. Before she had time to turn back again a chirping voice addressed her :

" Good morning, your Majesty/" it said.

Singular as was this form of address, Susan did not suppose that it was directed to anyone but herself. Indeed there was nobody on this part of the deck but herself to be addressed by the pink-faced little gentleman in a broad-brimmed hat and a round black cloak that flapped about him in the wind and seemed a difficult garment for wear at sea.

" Good morning/" she said, remembering that it was always wise to be polite to lunatics, whether harmless or escaped.

" I thought you had had enough of the Channel after they had got you safely back to Florence," chirruped her companion.

Susan caught an end of her blowing hair in one hand and looked at the speaker for a second before deciding on a reply. Then she said gently and kindly :

" Oh, I'm a good sailor, and I've not been to Florence yet."

" Not ? " said the little man, putting his head on one side and holding on to his hat with both hands. " But it is not a month since I last had the pleasure of visiting you there."

Susan decided that he was not mad, only mistaken, and that it would therefore be quite safe to contradict him.

" I think," she said, " that you are confusing me with some other girl. I am sure I have never met you before."

" You have never spoken to me before, but I know you too well to be mistaken."

" Who do you think I am? " said Susan, more puzzled than annoyed at this persistence.

"I do not know who you may suppose yourself to be today," he replied; " that is to say, I cannot repeat to you the name by which other mortals address you. But you were once called Simonetta, though this is denied by pedants, and you have always been the foam-born, the Cytherean, walking over the sea, rising from it as the moon goes down into the waves."

" Did you get up to see the moon this morning too? " asked Susan, wondering whether, when Rita said she was dotty, she really did seem as odd to her sister as this singular being seemed to her.

" No," said he with the hesitation of one anxious to tell nothing but the truth, " I cannot say I got up to see it, because I never went to bed last night. Nor must you suppose that I stayed on deck in order to avoid getting up to

see it. It never occurred to me that such a thing was to be seen. But, I *did* see it. A conjunction as beautiful as it is rare. A clear sky at dawn and the final rising of the old moon in the east before the sun eats it to the last shred. If only the immortal Sandro had shared our beautiful experience, he would have set that thread of a crescent over his sea-green waves and made it nacreous as the shell on which you came to land."

Susan sat down rather suddenly on a coil of rope.

"You know," she said, "it is really very interesting. You seem to think I came out of a shell—and, just before I woke this morning, I dreamed I was a pearl inside an oyster."

"Not at all, not at all. It was not a dream, I assure you. Nor was it an oyster. Conche, conque, nautilus, call it anything you like. Pearl-bearing certainly—and you have always worn pearls."

It did not seem worth while explaining to him that she would not have any pearls to wear till she was twenty-one. Before she could substitute some other remark for this piece of information, a gust of wind blew off the old gentleman's hat and disclosed some rather wild grey hair and a high forehead. He made a dart for his hat and a book dropped out of the

shelter of the cloak which now blew all to one side, disclosing a quite normal tweed suit and a gold watch-chain.

Susan bent down and secured the book. It was a small octavo volume bound in silver boards. She had never seen a book like it before. It felt smooth in her hands, and she saw that the thin pages were covered with print in a beautiful type and looked easy to read. During the few seconds she held it while its owner chased and caught his hat, Susan had time to wish that the book were hers and to decide that, just as its owner was the most unusual person she had ever met, so, quite properly, the book which belonged to him was unique of its kind and she could never hope to find its counterpart.

He took it from her, murmuring, " How kind! How gracious ! " but did not attempt to explain its delicate appearance or make any other reference to it as he stowed it away beneath his readjusted mantle.

As he did so, the hootings from above and the muffled tinkle of hidden bells below announced that the boat was about to enter the harbour, and Susan, remembering that she was only half dressed, said goodbye and, running across the deck, regained the cabin where Rita was up and had begun to pack their nightgear.

" Come and jump on the sponges," she said. " Mummie has had a bad night and it's going to be all Morcomb can do to get her ashore."

So Susan had no time to tell Rita of the very odd conversation in which she had just taken part. As she dealt with the sponges, and later while she drove hairpins into the tight knot of hair twisted on the nape of her neck, and slipped the elastic of her brown Robin Hood hat into place, Susan reflected that, even if she were to relate this experience, Rita would not believe it. Susan was not at all sure that she believed it herself.

Rita had gone down the quay to see her car through the landing formalities and Morcomb was reviving Mrs. Adderley with tea in a corner of the buffet. Susan, who did not want a second breakfast, had time on her hands and went off to look for a bookstall. After some wandering she found herself involved with a jostle of porters who were loading baggage on to the tram for the Gare Centrale. Most of the passengers were already seated, but, just as the driver had climbed into his place, a cry was heard from a belated porter carrying suitcases and driving before him the owner of the luggage who was still involved in the difficulty of battling with the breeze which agitated his circular cloak

and the wide brim of his hat, and retaining possession of such odds and ends of paraphernalia as the porter had not been able to thread on his baggage-strap.

Susan checked an impulse to go to his rescue. He was not an old enough gentleman to be helped by a strange girl. The fleeting idea that he was not really such an untidy traveller as he seemed at the moment, added to her hesitation. Also she did not think she had better remind him of their earlier meeting, at this crisis of his journey. He passed close to her without recognising her, either because he was in such a hurry, or because, with her hair all smooth and tidy and the brim of her pointed hat pulled down on one side of her forehead, she was not to be readily identified with the wind-blown creature who had risen from the head of the companion-way on deck an hour ago.

He was inside the tram and the conductor had shut the door on him with his belongings before she saw a gleam on the cobblestones in front of her. For the second time that morning she stooped and picked up a little book bound in silvered boards.

" Hi ! " she called and began to run.

But it was no use. The driver, late already, had set his vehicle grinding over the rails and it was turning the corner into the rue de Paris on

its way to the railway station. The swarm of porters had buzzed off to attend to another incoming boat. For the moment there was no-one in sight of whom she could enquire the way to the Lost Property Office. She turned the book and saw that a bird, it looked like a sea-gull, spread black wings on either side of a white body in the centre of the back of the cover ; below it appeared the words, *Extra Volume*. The front was bordered with a pattern of birds—two by two carrying what looked like a heart between them hanging from their bills. Another bird, the same size as the one on the back, flew low down on the side and beneath him ran the legend :

A GUILLEMOT BOOK

COPYRIGHT EDITION

Not to be introduced into the British Empire or the U.S.A.

Suddenly she knew why the type had seemed familiar when she had first picked up the book. Rita had smuggled home a copy of *Portrait in a Mirror* in this elegant format when she came back from her visit to Basil and Emilienne two years ago—it had the same bird on its cover, though it was bound in blue. She had seen the little volumes of this edition in shop windows and on bookstalls in Paris when she was at school there—but never, till now, a silver one. They were called the *Guillemot Books*. Held back by

some reluctance of which she was only half aware, she had not looked at the title. Now she let her eye travel up from the pictured bird and saw in clear letters across the silver—

SIMONETTA

An Essay in Reconstruction

by

ANTHONY X. FROME

If she had been struck on either cheek, the blood could not have flamed there more hotly or with greater suddenness. "Anthony?" she said, and again "Anthony/" because the sound of it on her tongue pleased her. Then, opening her handbag, she slipped the book in and covered the gleam of it with her handkerchief before she snapped the clasp fast again.

In less than thirty-six hours Susan had accumulated a weight of secrecy of which she had no desire to rid herself—and this last addition to the burden was tangible and might betray her at any moment. If only she could keep the book hidden until they had been in Paris for a day, Rita would suppose that Susan had bought it there. Susan did not mean to tell a lie about it; but if Rita took its presence for granted she need not say anything. Silence would not be quite truthful, of course, but if she told the

truth she would have to tell of her conversation with the book's owner, and the more she thought about it the less she wanted to do this. On the other hand, if she did not confess how she had come by the silver-bound volume, both Rita and her mother would suppose that she had bought it on account of its author's name. There could not be two English writers called A. X. Frome. Yesterday she had not known what either initial stood for. Now she knew the first half of the mystery—the second, the X., still represented the unknown.

" One day," said Susan to herself, as Rita let the Alvis out to sixty miles an hour on the straight, interminable *route nationale*, " one day I shall find out ! "

CHAPTER II

I

ANTHONY FROME said he would walk up from the lodge where the station taxi, a Ford of a forgotten vintage, had deposited him and his baggage, the driver having contracted to attend a local funeral for which he was already late. Frome was glad to be neither hurried nor guided in his first approach to a house he had so far taken on trust; the house which was to shelter him until the work he had in preparation was completed.

The drive wound uphill through a little wood and ended in front of a garage, evidently adapted not very long ago from a grey stone building which had once held stables and a coach-house. A flight of steps led up through a wall on one side of the yard to a terrace in front of the house. He paused by the parapet bounding a grass-plot, pleased and surprised to see that the trees below it had been cut back in order not to obscure the view. The hillside fell

away to the banks of a river which wound through meadow-land and marsh down a valley that widened towards the coast, ten miles to the westward, where the sea was now visible, a shimmering line against the horizon. The late afternoon was clear and bright and still. No house or barn could be seen from the terrace. The distant whirring of a mechanical reaper in some field below was the only perceptible evidence of human activity except for the white plume of smoke when a train travelled along the foot of the low range of hills on the south of the river. And the train was carrying human beings away from the valley ; soon it would be out of sight.

The lawyer fellow had told the truth. This was the quietest spot on earth. Not only were the village and the farms of the valley hidden from view; but no-one passing along the country road he had just left would suspect the existence of a house and garden half-way up the hillside above them. The lodge by the unimportant wooden gate in the hedge looked too much like any other well-found cottage, with its garden full of snapdragon and Michaelmas daisies, to attract particular attention : Frome himself had been a little surprised when the taxi-driver had stopped there and announced that this was his destination.

The woman at the lodge had given the keys to his servant and had said that her husband would help him to bring up the baggage. Mr. Frome, she added, would find the front door open. She would come up later on to show Gawkrödger, who had travelled down from London by motor cycle, where the plate and linen were kept and how to manage the hot-water arrangements. Thank goodness she wasn't one of these hen-like beings who want to take all male creatures under their wings. Gawkrödger would have quite enough to do with house-work and cooking without having to cope with females. When warned that Maze House, though described as small, contained at least twelve rooms, he had replied :

" Yo'll noa need more nor three for your oan use. Ah'll mak' do wi' kitchen and scoollery mysen."

Frome had not asked whether the man intended to sleep in the kitchen. Gawkrödger was far too good a servant not to be left to make his own arrangements. He had two phobias—women and dirt; and two manias—his motor cycle and cooking. Frome would not have raised any objection if Gawkrödger had proposed to sleep in a chimney.

He turned from the view, walking towards the house. It was a long white building of two

storeys under a stone roof that broke into umbrella-shaped gables above two small-paned windows on each side of the wide portico. It had slatted wooden shutters, once green ; but the yellow had faded out of the paint and they were now of that particular shade of blue no builder can be persuaded to mix. Frome saw with approval that no creepers obscured its pleasant spaces. Architecturally it belonged to no recognised period, but it had been built by someone who had an eye for proportion, and, to judge by the size and setting of the window glass, at least a hundred years ago. This estimate of its age was confirmed when he entered the hall and was faced with the staircase with its first shallow flight leading up to the tall window where it divided to right and left. He looked into the three rooms on the ground floor. The dining-room had a set of good Sheraton chairs, one or two eighteenth-century portraits of no particular interest, and a communicating door to what was evidently a pantry behind the service hatch—all quite conventional and well arranged. The drawing-room was its fitting counterpart, large and low, with windows to the south and west and a fireplace in which logs were set for the fire that might be needed any evening, especially if the windows looking on to the garden he had not yet seen were left open so that the scent of

tobacco flowers and night-flowering stocks might blow into the room. Chintz curtains and chair-covers ; Persian rugs ; low bookcases along one wall ; a Chinese landscape in a gilt frame above one of them ; an old French mirror ; a rose-bowl, filled, he supposed, that morning as a charming gesture of welcome from the owner he had never seen. It was all so feminine and pretty that he smiled a little ruefully as he imagined with what grimness Gawkrodger would clear away the rose-bowl and cover the furniture with dust-sheets before he had been many hours in the house. This clearly was not one of the three rooms to be allotted to him when they settled in. At the door he stopped to examine the contents of a table-case in which several pieces of gold and silver were displayed. They were probably not of any great value or Mrs. Adderley would have had them taken to her bank before going away : but the book he had come here to finish was called *Gems and Jewels in European History and Painting* and he had acquired the habit of examining any piece of jeweller's work that he saw.

The little collection was obvious enough. Two very pretty French snuff-boxes ; a pair of old paste buckles ; a globe watch in gold-and-blue enamel ; a lace-like fan of carved ivory with a monogram in its centre, probably eighteenth-

century Chinese work made to the order of some travelling Englishman ; a netted purse of maroon silk with gold tassels and a filagree ring ; a baby's coral (George the First) with a gold-chased whistle and four bells, one of them modern ; a bracelet composed of a set of linked miniatures on porcelain, each one depicting a girl in the costume of a different Swiss canton with the appropriate lake or mountain or chalet in the background ; a silver caudle-spoon ; an Egyptian tear-bottle : just the heterogeneous, mindless, haphazard collection of unrelated bibelots to be found in hundreds of drawing-rooms ; one more exasperating monument to the ineradicable magpie in feminine nature.

He was about to turn from this display when a small object in one corner of the case caught his eye. Bending down to examine it more closely he saw a metal pin, like a small dagger, the head of which spread out into a nest of leaves supporting two seated stags whose antlers touched one another with the suggestion of a six-pointed crown. Though he knew that this could not possibly be a genuine Minoan relic, its presence among all those frivolities of the modern world interested him at last. He had seen its counterpart some years ago in the collection of an Austrian nobleman who had specialised in forgeries of works of antiquarian

and archaeological interest. There were, so he had been told, only four of these objects in existence, and they had all been made in Vienna by the same man in 1905. The genuine article, from which they had been most admirably copied, had disappeared from the Hermitage, but two of the copies had found their way into private collections before the fraud was discovered. Frome's host, who had acquired a third after the exposure, had shown him, through a magnifying-glass, the minute traces of the acid which had been used to remove the mould in which the metal had been cast before the forger set to work on it by hand. The lid of the table was not locked. He raised it and took out the lovely fraud.

Feeling in his waistcoat pocket for the lens he carried with him, he examined the pin. A careful scrutiny failed to reveal the evidence he had been so sure of finding. This certainly was not one of the Viennese forgeries. It might be a copy from some other original by another hand. If so it had been admirably carried out. He was not an expert on the period to which this jewel belonged (his own work only went back to the tenth century) but the idea that it might be a genuine piece was too absurd to be entertained for more than one excited flash. He had gathered from the lawyer that Mrs. Adderley was a rather inconsequent person ; but even a

woman ought to have known that, if these crouching stags were not the copies he must still believe them to be, the proper place for them was a museum. Even as a copy the thing was out-of-place among snuff-boxes and shoe-buckles.

Frome pulled himself up at this point. The anachronisms of Mrs. Adderley's silver table were not his business. The Minoan pin was probably no more than the pretty toy she evidently supposed it to be. He restored it to its place. As he had already decided not to use this room, he need not ever see it again.

The study was better. It had been planned and furnished by a man. The deep arm-chairs were covered in leather ; the bookcases held works of reference ; the french window looked out over the terrace to the wide view he had just left. There was a large, convenient table, in the right place for all the papers and books he had brought with him for his work. The writing-desk was set against the wall by the window : the light fell on it from the left-hand side.

On the writing-desk there sat erect, his feathery tail folded majestically over his fore-paws, his green eyes shining above his whiskers, an enormous golden Persian cat. As Frome walked towards it the creature rose slowly to its feet and began to rub its chin against the

corner of a framed photograph propped up in the centre of the fresh pad of butter-coloured blotting-paper on the desk.

Before he could reach it the cat had leapt to the floor and, in one yellow streak, was gone from the room.

2

Frome was unpacking and arranging the notes and photographs and books of reference he needed for the completion of his monograph. Although he had limited himself to a study of such jewels belonging to historical persons as were still in existence, and to those represented in European portrait-painting, he had, after the first drafts of his scheme had been made, found himself involved in a task so great that the year he had given himself for its completion had already gone by in the travel and research needed to supplement and verify his previous knowledge of the subject. He had not yet written more than a few detached fragments of the book itself. The furnished flat in Bloomsbury which he had occupied since the death of his father and the break-up of his home was not very comfortable or large enough to house his accumulation of books and papers. Being unwilling to involve himself in the business of looking for a house of his own in which to settle down, he had been

glad when Mr. Vulliamy, to whom he had spoken of his wish to take some, not too large, house in a quiet situation and away from town, had made the suggestion which was turning out so well.

⁴"You understand," Frome had said, "that I can't go anywhere where they want to leave their own servants. Gawkrodger won't work with a woman."

" Can he manage a house single-handed ? "

" He ran the Chester Gate house for my father and me after my mother's death. There was some sort of daily boy I believe in the basement, but no other indoor servant. He says he is eating his head off in the flat."

Mr. Vulliamy had noted " will bring own staff " on the list of details he was about to send to Mrs. Adderley: by return of post he was happy to inform Mr. Frome that this arrangement had been regarded as most satisfactory.

It was certainly working very well so far.

Gawkrodger had learnt all he needed to know from Mrs. Ripley within ten minutes of his arrival the evening before and had then proceeded to unpack his master's clothes and to cook an adequate dinner. While serving this he had announced :

" Yo'll be sleeping in room overhead. There's

a bathroom on same landing. Yo'll not be wanting to go on t'other side of house—not upstairs. I'll be putting all them little bedrooms into doost-sheets tomorrow, as well as parlour."

" All right, Gawkrodger—but one of the smaller rooms would have done for me."

" There's twin beds in the one—and the others are no sort of sleeping-places for a man. There's a proper wardrobe wi' a boot-rack in room AhVe takken for you," said Gawkrodger with finality.

Frome had slept well in the double bed and had observed that the man's wardrobe which had earned Gawkrodger's approval had evidently been moved in from the locked dressing-room for his convenience : a margin of unfaded wallpaper in one side of it showed that some larger piece had stood there until recently. This was another of several instances of the trouble which had been taken to arrange the house for his coming. The bowls of fresh flowers in the hall and living-rooms ; Gawkrodger's discovery of bread, butter and milk in the larder, as well as of a row of home-made jams, marmalade and bottled fruit; ink in all the inkwells on the various writing-tables ; delicately sharpened pencils in the pen-trays ; a newly written-out list of tradesmen's tele-

phone numbers pinned up in the kitchen ; the information, conveyed by the gardener's wife, that the servants' wireless set had gone to be put into working order and would be re-installed next day—at every turn there was evidence of friendliness, and a desire that the stranger should feel at home in the house to which he had come.

It was, Frome supposed as he sat down to breakfast, the accumulation of these small details that gave him the sense of a presence other than his own which had met him as he crossed the threshold yesterday and was very pleasantly renewed as thick slices of orange-peel edged with paler gold in a dark jelly of marmalade broke into slow translucent waves on the edge of his plate. It was as good to eat as it was to look at; home-made; bitter-sweet on the tongue and tawny like the leather of the chairs and of the rugs on the polished floor. It matched the room and it matched the noble head and ruff of the Persian cat who sat on the window-sill engrossed in the activities of his toilet.

Frome had not seen this cat again since its disappearance from the study where it had seemed to be guarding that photograph of a girl with heavy, pale hair closely braided on each side of a small, half-smiling face, tilted a little sideways on a long neck : the photograph

which had startled him by its resemblance to the head of Venus against the sky of sunrise painted, four hundred years ago, by the jeweller's apprentice Alessandro di Mariano dei Filipepi, known as Sandro Botticelli.

For one moment he believed that he held a copy from some hitherto unrecognised portrait of the young bride of Marco Vespucci for whose favour Giuliano de' Medici had tilted in the lists of the Florentine tournament less than a year before her death ; the grave and visionary girl whose beauty haunts the verse of the poets ; the nymphs and madonnas of the painters of the Quattrocento, and whose body, carried on an open bier through the streets, dazzled the city's imagination and became the legend that has crystallised around her name.

Gawkrodger, bringing in the cases in which his master's books and papers were packed, had interrupted Frome's wondering contemplation. He woke to the obvious modernity of the portrait, and, putting it back on the writing-table, proceeded to go round the house with his servant. Later in the evening he had wandered about the garden, smoking his after-dinner pipe in the gathering dusk, and planning out the work he must begin again next day. Though he had not forgotten the photograph he had not returned to the study to look at it again. His

one sight of it had taken him back to ideas he believed he had explored sufficiently, and to a state of mind to which he did not now desire to return.

3

Some years earlier Anthony Frome had made a name for himself by the publication of a book—half critical essay, half historical reconstruction, based on his own discovery in the archives of a Florentine castle of six drawings and studies, all of one figure, draped and undraped, and manifestly the work of Sandro Botticelli. Though they were unsigned, the draughtsmanship, the style and conception of the work, coupled with the evidence given by chemical tests of the vellum on which they were drawn and of the ink and carbon, as well as of the colour used in two of them, left no doubt of their authenticity. The size and shape of the small sheets and the rather agitated detail of the pen-and-ink sketches showed that they belonged to the period immediately preceding the later illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*. Frome had come to the conclusion that they represented the painter's first conception of Beatrice as a figure embodying, yet again, the unforgotten beauty of Simonetta as it had shone through each naked Venus, each veiled and pensive Mary to whom he had given

the braided hair and pale, contemplative eyes of the girl who had died when he was thirty-two and she ten years younger ; the wife of one of his patrons ; the frantically worshipped idol of another. The fact that this conception had been rejected and that another Beatrice, with firmer features and more compact physique, had replaced it in the later drawings, fitted in with a theory the young art critic had formulated when he had convinced himself that, after that first portrait for which she must have sat to him, with the braids of her hair studded with pearls, he had never painted Simonetta again from life, but always from her picture in his soul's imaginary sight, and always without jewels, because he was too poor to give such tokens to any woman. The argument of other critics and historians that, being the wife of Marco Vespucci and the reputed mistress of Giuliano de' Medici, she would never have posed to him for the naked figure of Venus and of Truth, he had dismissed as pedantic and unimaginative, before the discovery of the drawings.

His first examination of them showed that these were illustrations for the *Vita Nuova*. Here, in his age, the painter had drawn her, curving above an unfinished Endymion, Semele in a flying scarf of cloud, and had set her once more in the shell that bore Venus to the shore,

but this time in profile with both arms holding her wind-blown hair to her breast.

Under the second of these drawings, both of which were coloured, were traced two lines from the eighth section of the poem :

*Chi nan merta salute
Non sperì mai d'aver sua compagnia.*

The robes of Beatrice had fallen away from the essential Simonetta in these two studies. It was as if her gentle, unrelenting ghost had refused to lend itself to the celebration of any mortal woman but herself. And, though the praise of Beatrice was written faintly on other sheets, it was clear that the project had been abandoned. No record of the existence of the rest of the series remained to show whether these recovered sketches had been first attempts or secret afterthoughts.

The interest aroused by Frome's discovery of the *Vita Nuova* drawings was given a new value in the popular press by two circumstances which had nothing to do with its artistic and historical importance. He had come upon this treasure by accident. The binding of a volume of seventeenth-century manuscripts and letters on which he was at work had broken away from its spine and had disclosed a padding of vellum sheets between the leather and the boards. He

had had the curiosity to draw them out of their hiding-place. It was said that the impoverished nobleman in whose library this revelation had taken place was restrained with difficulty from tearing off the bindings of every other book in his possession when, after experts had examined them, the genuineness of the young Englishman's find was established and proclaimed. The curators of every cabinet of drawings in the metropolitan museums of Europe and America were besieged by the owners of other private libraries, on whom no such restraint had been exercised, and who, from the ruins of good books, produced a crop of worthless or mediocre scribbled paper. When this scratching for hidden treasure had spent itself another sensation arose.

The owner of the now famous drawings sold them to a dealer. The Italian Government made a gesture prohibiting their export, and then, from one day to another, the treasures disappeared. This development was given even greater publicity than the news of the discovery, and much, though not all, of the gossip about it filled the world's press for a fortnight.

Frome himself was not concerned in the business either of the sale or of the subsequent scandal. The fact that malicious and ill-informed gossip connected his name with that

of the dealer from whose care they had been mysteriously abstracted never reached his ears. If he had heard the rumour he would have paid little heed to it, knowing that it could not possibly obtain credence in any quarter where he was known.

He had been recalled from Florence by the news of his mother's serious illness. Family affairs occupied him for some months. When his parents departed together for a voyage of convalescence, Anthony, left alone in the house in Regent's Park, settled down to his book on *Simonetta*. He had had the photographs of *Vita Nuova* drawings made as soon as he had come upon them, and, with these, he was well enough equipped for his work. Regret for the disappearance of the originals, which in any case he had not expected to see again, was modified by his conviction that, far from being destroyed, they were in all probability in the safe custody either of an able thief or of some unscrupulous millionaire collector who had acquired them and did not intend to say so for a long time to come. Their disappearance was not without its fortunate aspect, as it lent an added value to the publication of his book. One of the drawings was reproduced in it together with other illustrations from the well-known pictures in public and private collections.

The work was an instantaneous success. Frome had reconstructed the famous story of the lovers without giving his narrative the heaviness of too much documentation. It gave pleasure to the general reader, and he had conducted his attack on the atheism of the critics who rejected the Simonetta legend with so much wit and such lightly balanced learning and judgment that even the ignorant could follow it with enjoyment. A few pundits shook their heads over all this modern psychological analysis; but the learned world, on the whole, accepted his deductions, based as they were on a considerable body of new or reconsidered evidence.

Before long Anthony Frome found the £500 a year left him by his grandmother very pleasantly increased by the royalties which poured in from England and America. He was asked to lecture in the States. *Simonetta* was translated into French, German and Dutch. It was startling to be rung up by his agent one morning and asked if he would consider an offer from Hollywood for the film rights of this best-seller: but, though he declined this, he was persuaded to meet a young woman who had based the scenario for a play on his version of the story. The girl was not only intelligent but very charming to look at. She ran a semi-private business as a dealer in works of art, and had already written two

plays which had had quite satisfactory runs on the London stage. At the end of a month Frome had asked her to marry him.

It was not until after his parents' return that Joyce Wentworth admitted, rather too casually, that she was married already. Startled as he was by this disclosure, Anthony was sufficiently in love to forgive her for having entered into an engagement without telling him of this bar to its consummation ; but, as it became apparent that the husband in the background had only retired there on the advent of a possible co-respondent who could be asked for heavy damages, a sense of discomfort he had not allowed himself to admit in his relationship with her asserted itself. Joyce Wentworth's assumption that Anthony could and would buy off poor Tom accounted for something hard and calculating he had tried not to recognise in other smaller questions which had arisen between them while they had worked together on the play. Finally he had been obliged to tell his father of the situation in which he found himself, and the old lawyer had threatened to do what lay so completely in his power and to obstruct the passage of a collusive divorce. Anthony emerged from the shame and confusion of the succeeding weeks a free man, and, so he believed, a woman-hater. The sudden death of

Mrs. Frome from heart failure was attributed by him, and by his father, to the worry caused by his entanglement. Frome's grief for his mother only added to his resentment.

His infatuation for Joyce Wentworth had been coloured by the romantic atmosphere in which the study of one of the most romantic figures in the tales of chivalry had steeped his mind. He had burned with the flame of his own youth while writing of young, idealistic love. The sentimentality inseparable from such a theme had hung about his first meetings with the young woman whom he credited with a like ardour for the story she was bent on turning into a box-office success. She had flattered him by insisting on a resemblance between him and the portraits of Giuliano de' Medici. They went together to the National Gallery to look at *The Sleeping Mars*, in which she traced a likeness already noticed by others, and she had asked for an enlargement of a bent head in profile from *The Adoration of the Magi* in the Uffizi, saying she preferred it to any actual photograph of him.

It was on the occasion of their visit to the National Gallery that his first sense of disillusionment had troubled him. The dark and vivid girl who wore her well-cut clothes so admirably and talked so well about pictures,

flattened into artificiality, as though she were a figure drawn for a fashion plate. It was the Venus, brooding and serene in her flowing white robe, with the golden snakes of hair falling on each side of her lifted chin, who, once again, as how often before, looking out from other frames than this, became alive with immortal breath. The moment passed : on recalling it he told himself it was absurd and unfair to contrast a living woman with a painted shade, and that, if Joyce had borne even so slight a resemblance to Simonetta as she had detected between him and the Medicean youth, he would probably have disliked her at sight.

When, three months later, the rupture between them became definite and final he knew that his illusions had gone. The long dream of supra-sensual love and romantic beauty which had encompassed his early manhood and illumined his work was over. Everything he had believed in and proclaimed while writing *Simonetta* became distasteful to him : he was a man, he had put away childish things.

An invitation from the curator of the art treasures of Holyrood to report on some drawings by Corneille de Lyon gave him the impetus for the work on which he was now engaged. He had known he must fill the void in his life left by the dissipation of the mirage in

which Simonetta had floated ; but it was not until he was confronted by the portrait by Van der Goes of Margaret of Denmark, Queen to James III of Scotland, that the idea for this book formulated itself. He had felt the need for some exacting and continuous outlet for the habit of industry and research which, now that he was nearing his thirtieth year, had equipped him for work of greater importance than anything he had hitherto accomplished. The central idea of the book which had made him famous had been a study of all the unjewelled figures in the work of an artist who, by early training, had learned not only how to paint jewels, but also how they were wrought and fashioned. The pearls and gems and enamelled beads with which this Scottish queen was bedizened had been painted within a few months of the day when Botticelli completed his work on the terrible frescoes of the hanging bodies of the Archbishop of Pisa and his fellow conspirators who had committed sacrilege and murder when they plotted the death of Simonetta's lover, and Giuliano de' Medici was stabbed to death in the Duomo during Mass. In style, in detail, in subject, this stiff Dutch portrait represented the antithesis of every quality he had sought and delighted in during the years of his pursuit of the etherealised simplicities which

characterised every figure in which he had traced the reiterated statement of the Florentine painter's celebration of a beauty, seen for so short a time and remembered throughout the rest of his life.

His mood was so perverse that the mere fact that the profile of this bejewelled queen faced to the left served to confirm his inclination to devote himself to the cataloguing of painted jewels. All the profiles he had used to illustrate his ascriptions of such figures as Jethro's daughter or the third grace in the *Primavera*, to the same model as that of the accepted portraits of Simonetta, faced the other way. The study of these historic pieces would lead him into precise investigation and so clear his mind of the fancy he now wished to forget if not to repudiate altogether.

A friend, who had already done some work in this direction, fanned the spark by accounts of traditions and inventories in which such things, some lost, some still preserved in private collections, were to be traced.

The fanciful side of his mind was amused by the thought of tracing the style of Affable Partidge, the jeweller, through the profusion of Elizabethan ornament: the romanticism he had brought to the quest of Simonetta stirred again as his friend recounted the splendours of the brooch

of Lorn, and discussed the riddles of every hinged recess of the Darnley jewel, where the pelican in her piety, the salamander, the two-faced satyr, Faith with her cross and Truth with her mirror, the clasped hands of lovers over a skull in the heart of a sapphire, the sun in his glory surrounded by stars and worshipped by the phoenix and the moon—each bore their legend and their mystery.

Notes of his own, bearing on investigations he had not had time to follow out, came back to him as he listened. He remembered half of a locket he had seen in Milan, showing an ark floating on waves of mother-of-pearl and surrounded by a golden line :

Saevas tranquilla per undas, per tot discrimina rerum.

He thought of a copy of the Alfred jewel, made for the young sister of a famous archaeologist, who had produced it from her vanity-case as she sat beside him and had turned what had promised to be a boring dinner-party into one of his most delightful memories. All the lost jewels of which he had ever read: the chain of water flowers a Duchess of Norfolk had bequeathed to her child ; the collar of gold given to Prince Arthur by Henry VII, " wyt rede roses and white, enameled wyt pauncies wyt

wyres of pinnes " ; strange prophylactic gems ; loadstones ; serpents' tongues ; horns of unicorn—there was no end to the by-ways he might enter.

His friend spoke with a specialist's anger against the craze for novelty, the lunatic impulses of fashion, which, as age succeeded age, had seen fit to melt and recast its heirlooms, and of the waves of religious fanaticism which destroyed without replacing the ornaments of its devotees.

The idea of prefacing his work with an account of the great bonfire in which Savonarola attempted to destroy all such gauds pleased Frome for a time and was rejected when the field of his study enlarged itself to include that singular object, the crystal of Lothair, engraved with the story of Susannah and the Elders, and worn as the centre-piece of a golden clasp by the bishops of Sens which had fascinated him years ago when, as a boy, he wandered for long holiday afternoons in the British Museum.

Within a month he had settled down to a scheme covering the famous European jewels of a thousand years.

4

He had worked for an hour arranging catalogues and photographs and spring-back clips,

on the large table in the centre of the study. Breaking off to light a cigarette he walked across the room to the window on the left of the writing-desk. On the path leading between two herbaceous borders to a door in the wall that screened the stable-yard from the house, the yellow cat was playing a stately game with a large rubber ball, a child's toy, painted blue and sprinkled with gilt and silver stars. Watching the creature as it patted and pounced and then lay with the ball held in its fore-paws, its tail sweeping the flagstones in slow and mimic wrath, Frome was reminded of the photograph with which it had seemed to be playing at Una and the lion yesterday. He turned to the desk with the half-formed intention of putting away in one of the drawers this odd reminder of his one-time preoccupation.

The photograph had disappeared.

For a moment he almost believed that the cat who, by methods of its own, had evidently conveyed the ball from some indoor room to the place in the sun where it now glistened, had likewise removed the frame and its contents. He bent down to look for broken glass on the parquet : but there was no such trace, nor was the photograph to be seen anywhere else in the room.

He pulled open the drawers on either side of

the knee-hole to see if Gawkrodger had forestalled his intention or put the photograph into one of them: but they were all empty, save for a few boxes of stamped notepaper in one and envelopes and a ball of string in another, further evidences of thoughtfulness on Mrs. Adderley's part.

Though his original impulse had been to put the photograph away himself, its removal annoyed him. Now that it was no longer there he wanted to look at the thing again. He wished to satisfy himself of the resemblance the brief sight of it had suggested to him, or be assured he was mistaken. Gawkrodger might have moved the frame when he was dusting that morning. It had, Frome remembered, been standing on the blotter: but there was no reason why it should have been taken out of the room. Perhaps the woman from the lodge had come up and fetched it away, though this seemed unlikely. In any case it must be found. He was responsible for everything left in the house he had taken: nobody had any right to remove things left there by the owners while he occupied the place. He would speak to Gawkrodger about it at lunch-time.

Frome began to fill the drawers of the bureau with his own writing materials and such papers as he did not immediately require. Among these

was a sheaf of cuttings from various periodicals concerning sales and exhibitions of jewels and pictures. He had neglected to keep his cutting-book up to date and decided that this more or less mechanical work would serve to get him into the right mood for taking up his interrupted writing again.

He looked round for his shears and could not find them in the wooden box where he kept his pens, pencils, rules, compasses and a small magnifying-glass. He must have left the shears behind in London : all the cases of papers were now unpacked. There was nothing for it but to go upstairs and fetch a pair of nail-scissors, much as he disliked using this instrument for cutting paper. On his way across the hall he remembered noticing a long-bladed pair of shears with ornate handles lying beside a paperknife on the writing-table in the drawing-room. They were the sort of thing women had lying about and did not use ; probably the screw that held the blades together was either worn or stiff. Still, if the shears were in working order, they would be better than a pair of nail-scissors.

The drawing-room door was shut. Blinds were drawn down on the closed windows; the rugs had been rolled up and piled in a heap ; dusting sheets had been spread across a central mass formed by the chesterfield and all the easy-

chairs, pushed together in the middle of the room. It looked like a relief model of some mountain range rising abruptly from the plain. Gawkrödger had lost no time in devastating this centre of femininity. The man was, of course, justified in making arrangements to simplify his task of keeping the house in order by putting the largest room out of commission and protecting its furnishings against dust and sunlight. Still, Frome wished he had not been quite so prompt about it. It seemed a little discourteous to the amiable woman, who had not left the house twenty-four hours ago, to disarrange the room she had set so charmingly ready for occupation, before the flowers in the vases she had filled had begun to fade : Frome wondered what Gawkrödger had done with them. The bowls were all empty now, ranged together like so many pudding-basins on a table by the wall.

The Sheraton bureau was closed. Frome pulled back its slanting lid and saw that the cut-glass inkwells had been emptied and washed out. Gawkrödger was thorough in his work. But the gilt-handled shears were still there with the paperknife on one side of the blotter. On the blotter itself, face downwards, lay a large photograph frame.

Frome knew what face would look out of it before he picked up the frame and turned to

examine it by the shrouded light of the window. This more careful scrutiny confirmed the impression of his first interrupted study of the picture. The pose of the fair head, tilted sideways on the long neck, was the pose of Aphrodite : but the close braids of hair gave to the eyes, wide apart under the raised eyebrows, the wondering look of the Madonna of disputed authenticity in London who, though she may not have been painted by the master himself, still has the tender mouth and hands of Venus and of the nymph of Spring. The seated Virgin with the pomegranate, hanging with its even more lovely companion of the Magnificat, one on either side of the sea-born goddess in the Uffizi, stripped of their light veils, might have looked up and out of the canvas and have posed for this photograph yesterday. Had the girl, whose portrait it actually was, any idea of how closely she resembled the girl who had died in Florence one day in April nearly five hundred years ago ? There were, so far as he knew, no reproductions of Italian paintings, no photographs or Arundel prints anywhere in the house which, except for the family portraits in the dining-room and the Chinese landscape on the wall behind him, was remarkably free from pictures.

Frome had not given more than a second's

glance into the three bedrooms Gawkrödger proposed to deal with as he had already dealt with the drawing-room: but, though he thought there might be a picture or two in each of them, there were no reproductions of famous masterpieces, or his critic's mind would have noted and remembered them. It did not follow, of course, because she had not covered her walls with the commonplaces of the public galleries of Europe, that Mrs. Adderley had no love of or acquaintance with them, or that she was unaware of how like the girl in this photograph was to the subject of so many of them. She might, quite possibly, have acquired the photograph because of this resemblance. It was probably not that of either of the daughters Mr. Vulliamy had mentioned to him. Mr. Vulliamy had spoken of two girls, as well as of the married son they were going to visit somewhere abroad. This might be a photograph of the son's wife—or even, so posed, and so treated, of some artist's model, deliberately taken thus to suggest the pictures for which she might have stood. If so, it was a mistake not to have taken the hands as well. Perhaps the hands were wrong ; not the large sculptured hands of Aphrodite, but thin, meaningless hands with scarlet varnished nails, or short-fingered and insensitive, belying the delicate youth of the neck and the bare shoulders

only just visible above the haze in which the photographer had surrounded them.

The little enamelled clock on the bureau chimed twelve: before it had completed its strokes, a whirring in the hall announced that the grandfather clock was about to confirm this reckoning of the hour. Frome wondered if Gawkrodger would regard it as part of his duty to keep the frivolous timepiece going in the closed room. He would ask him about this too, at lunch-time. As it was already noon he had better stop work altogether and get some exercise. It was foolish to idle about in this shut and airless room on such a day.

He took up the shears, replaced the photograph on the blotter where he had found it, and closed the bureau. At the door he paused for a moment to look at the glass-topped table. It had not been covered over : in the dim light he could make out the mild heads of the stags facing one another above the shaft of the Minoan pin. The idea that this bauble had belonged to the girl whose photograph he had just put away flickered oddly through his mind as he left the room and closed the door behind him.

He found the garden even more delightful than the house. Though he could see over the

privet hedges it took him some time to get to the centre of the maze. He found two semicircular benches there on either side of a stone bird-bath. He sat there to wait for the return of the birds his coming had alarmed. Soon they were back again, dropping from the air ; rising from the shelter of the hedges. A pair of chaffinches hopped at his feet with the air of those accustomed to largess of crumbs or hempseed. Frome wondered what influence had restrained the yellow cat from prowling in this sanctuary, and remembered that the entrance to the little maze was closed by a door as high as the hedges and that he had noticed a wire netting along the ground before he took the first turning when he came in. If he could find the netting again and follow it he would reach the gate. But he was in no hurry to leave this sun-warm quietness, now he had hit on a clue to its little mystery. It was amusing to sit here and reconstruct the life and habits of the people who had gone away from the place where the birds were friendly and the roses in the garden through which he had come had been chosen and nurtured with so much care. He forgot that he was now a woman-hater. The Mrs. Adderley who had planted the rose garden and had found time to fill bowls from it before she left the house yesterday ; the woman who could tame

wild birds and protect them from the cat who was so very much master of all he surveyed ; the woman who had not left an empty larder for the incoming stranger to fill had treated him as a friend, and his thought of her grew friendly. His mother might have done just these same small things if ever she had let the rather sombre Victorian house in which he had been born and brought up, though there would have been no rose garden, and no golden cat; no birds, and no strange face of a fifteenth-century Aphrodite to startle the newcomer with its own unawareness when he entered it.

Why had that lovely, disturbing immortal been left, the only photograph in the room, or in any room ?

The question broke into his pleasant reverie, jerking him back to the unhealed resentment that still throbbed at any reminder of the work which had, at one time, given him so much joy-

All women were the same, he told himself angrily—egoists—scheming to attract attention to themselves—even when they appeared to be concerned for the comfort and pleasure of those about them. What were all the little feminine touches he had been flattered by but signs of a wish to be recognised, even in absence ; traps to catch a grateful interest ? Madge Adderley—

he remembered the signature to a letter Mr. Vulliamy had shown him—it was the name of a schemer—soft and yielding and relentless. Gawkrodger, who had emptied the rose-bowls and hidden the photograph, had understood her perfectly. He knocked out his pipe and began to make his way out of the maze.

At the gate he was met by the yellow cat, who, seeing that Frome had no intention of allowing him to slip through, made an elaborate pretence of having come to meet him, and, turning slowly on his tracks, with a backward look over his golden ruff, invited the stranger's company on a walk he proposed to take.

Frome accepted the creature's lead, and, following it across the grass, found himself in the kitchen garden where the man who had brought up his luggage yesterday was on his way to dinner.

" Marning, sir," said the gardener, returning Frome's greeting. " I zee as Isaac has taken to ee."

" So his name is Isaac," said Frome. ^{<4} " He's a fine creature."

" He'm all but human," said the gardener. " Has his set habits. He be on his way now to the young ladies' arbour. Sits there in the sun every afternoon as regular as clockwork."

" I hope Mrs. Ripley has told Gawkrodger what food to give him."

" Milk mainly, and mashed potatoes and a boiled cod's head on Fridays," said the man. " I be taking a few late peas in for your dinner, sir, and I'll tell him over again if my missus didn't make it clear."

Frome thanked him and followed the cat down a flagged path to a little enclosure bisected by a pergola which appeared to be the harbour in question.

The pergola separated a neat lawn with a flower-bed in its centre from a more ambitious and also less orderly garden. A small asparagus-bed had gone to seed in one corner of it and showed the crimson gleam of its berries in a green mist. There was a rock-garden in the opposite corner. In the centre of a bed of Mrs. Simpkins a darker mosaic was set with round white pebbles arranged in a succession of irregular capital letters. It was to this sheltered hollow that Isaac directed his steps. Before the cat could accomplish his aim and settle down for his siesta on the inscription, Frome had read the name it recorded.

5

The drive that led up to the Maze House stable-yard from the high-road narrowed into a footpath behind it, and this, after zigzagging through a larch wood, made a final steep effort

and brought the climber out on to a cart track that ran for ten miles along the downs until they sloped to the lighthouse and the sea. Frome had set out soon after luncheon, and had walked for three hours, setting his mind in order ; clearing his way through the debris of business and sorrow ; of financial arrangements and loose ends of personal relationships which had filled it since his father's death. Now at last he had finished with these distractions. He had made it clear to such friends as had the right to know that he was going into retreat for a year and had come, through the upheaval of getting rid of his flat and storing his furniture, to this haven of quietness where he could forget everything but the work he had neglected for so many weeks.

The upland air, the brisk and easy exercise of a long walk over the turf, soothed his nerves and stimulated his mind, and he swung down through the pink dust of the late September evening with whole paragraphs of the chapter he would begin to write after dinner trooping in order through his brain, sentence by measured sentence, short, clear and luminous to match the concrete objects with which they were to deal.

In the hall he found Gawkrodger.

" Parson called/" he announced. " Ah towd

him t'were noa use coming agen."

" Was he alone ? "

" He'd more sense than to come here wi' his missus," said Gawkrodger, " but he browt a nasty little tyke. One of them lap-dogs as barks soprano. Ah judged him by that."

" Look here, Gawkrodger," said Frome, " I don't want to see all sorts of people, but I hope you didn't really warn the Vicar off."

" I tow'd him I wor born and bred an Independant and that you were no better than a heathen."

" Was that necessary ? "

" It didn't scare him, if that's what you mean. What he coom for was vegetables."

" Vegetables ? "

" And fru-it."

<k Are you sure ? "

" Ah am that. He said Mrs. Adderley always sent fru-it and stoof for Harvest Thanksgiving."

" Oh ! " said Frome, " that'll be all right. Tell the gardener to attend to it."

" Ah've doon so," said Gawkrodger.

It was, of course, quite within the man's province to give this instruction, and Frome had told him that he did not intend to see callers, but he was annoyed. It had been all very well in London in a small flat, with no garden and no unexpected visitors, for Gawk-

rodger to exercise the right to order and exclude. Here things were different. Already Frome had begun to feel a sense of proprietorship. This house was no impersonal shelter : it and the ground in which it stood formed a domain over which he had rights, and which in its turn asserted its own right to be governed. It exacted decisions from him, not acquiescence in any order Gawkrodger took upon himself to issue. Gawkrodger was what he believed women called a treasure ; but a treasure of any kind can, by its very nature, become an embarrassment. Also, like other treasures, he was an heirloom.

6

Pliny Kitchener Gawkrodger was the ninth son of the coachman who had served Frome's mother's family for all the years she could remember. He had escaped the early death which had overtaken most of Mrs. Gawkrodger's far too numerous babies, surviving to become pantry-boy and later footman at the Manor. When, in the course of nature, Pliny, as he was than called, fell in love with and desired to marry one of the housemaids, his master had been able to secure for the young couple the tenancy of an inn at the head of the Yorkshire dale where he owned fishing rights. The arrange-

ment had turned out well and the inn became the resort of anglers in the summer, and the goal of walkers and riders at all times. Mrs. Frome and her husband stayed at The White Horse on many occasions after her father's death when the property reverted to a distant and unwelcoming cousin. It was to the young Gawkrodgers that Anthony was sent for a month when he was convalescent after scarlet fever, and it was to Mr. Frome that Gawkrodger came for advice and help when his buxom wife announced that she was tired of him and intended to spend the rest of her life in other company. What Gawkrodger wanted to know was, whether he would be within his rights in slaying his wife and her paramour, if he could catch them together. The idea of divorce, when suggested to him, was repudiated as being the resort of a softy, a thing he never had been and didn't propose to become. This mixture of caution and resentment was rendered rather more than less dangerous by the fact that Mrs. Gawkrodger had declined to indicate which of several suspects was responsible for her change of heart.

Anthony was sixteen and at Marlborough at the time, and was not told of this upheaval. It had seemed providential to Mrs. Frome that the outbreak of war should have provided a solution of the problem of finding an outlet for Gawk-

rodger's militant indignation. He went to France with the first batch of Territorials to leave the country, and it was to the Fromes' house in Bloomsbury that he returned when on leave. He spent the last six months of the war in hospital recovering from shell-shock which had temporarily blinded him.

Mrs. Frome had made an attempt to reconcile the suffering hero with his wife, who was still running The White Horse, as a quasi-widow, the partner of her guilt having been killed at Scarborough during the bombardment of the 16th of December in 1914. The poor lady took the dreary war-time journey up to Yorkshire in order to tell Mrs. Gawkrodger exactly how ill and how helpless Pliny was. She had never made a greater mistake.

Mrs. Gawkrodger having tasted freedom and independence was in no mind to relinquish these blessings in order to be tied to a blind man for the rest of her life. She'd kept the business going for close on four years without him and she wasn't minded to forget the past, war or no war. Mrs. Frome came back to London with a chill that grew worse and developed into influenza. The only bright spot in the whole wretched adventure was that she had said nothing to the man himself before going. However, her husband, who had hoped that his wife's mediation might result in

relieving her of her worry over Gawkrodger's future, had in an unguarded hour, while visiting the invalid in hospital, let slip the fact that she had been made ill by the fatigue and anxieties of a long journey to Yorkshire, and the man had guessed its purpose. The result was definite and surprising. Roused from the apathy of his condition, Gawkrodger exploded into an outburst of mingled anger and relief. He had suspected that something of the kind was afoot and had been afraid that he would have no choice but to go back to his wife if she were willing to take him. The news of her refusal to do this, and of Mrs. Frame's collapse, acted as a stimulus. In a week's time his sight had returned.

" Ah'll go to her funeral, and pay for it gladly," was his only comment when Mrs. Frame was able to see him and to tell him her own version of the interview that had had such a surprising consequence.

There still remained the problem of finding occupation for him in a world dislocated by the demobilisation. This was solved by Gawkrodger's own suggestion that he should employ his talent for cooking in Mrs. Frame's kitchen, seeing that the dearth of cooks and the high-mindedness of such as could be induced to take temporary jobs formed not the least of the poor lady's troubles.

The scheme had worked almost better than was quite comfortable. Gawkrodger was not only a gifted cook, he was also a glutton for work, and he saw no reason why any servant should not do a full-time job and then some. In less than a month the house was being run by Gawkrodger and another ex-Service man of more polished manners whom he had co-opted to do what he considered the finicking jobs above-stairs. Mrs. Frame's maid, being like Gawkrodger, a family retainer, and of ripe age, was not only tolerated but pampered by the two men, who were perfectly willing to carry up her meals in order to preserve their bachelor freedom below-stairs. The Fromes were comfortable and, if Gawkrodger's manner lacked respect, his integrity and devotion were beyond praise.

So the man remained with the family in whose service he had been born and, as a compensation for the indoor life he had chosen, put his savings into the purchase of a motor cycle on which he spent the occasional days out and infrequent holidays he arranged for on a system of his own. Whether he spent more time travelling on this possession or in taking down and reassembling the engine in the shed in the yard which he had cleared for it, was a debatable point.

Anthony, who had spent a great deal of his

time in Rome and in Paris during the ten years that followed Gawkrodger's establishment in his parents' house, took it for granted that the man should remain with him when it was broken up and only realised gradually that it would be harder to get rid of him than it was to put up with his uncouth manners and his autocratic ways. Also, though he did not admit it to himself, the knowledge that, years ago and in circumstances of which he had never been told the details, Gawkrodger had been badly treated by a woman had made Frome more docile under the servant's tyranny during the crisis in his own love-affair and had increased his sense of the man's very real sympathy and kindness at the time of old Mr. Frome's death.

Gawkrodger was invaluable; but Frome, as he went through the hall without making any protest against the order given to the gardener (after all it was the order he would have given in any case), found himself wishing that the process of clearing away every removable trace of a feminine hand in the arrangements of the house could be arrested. He missed the flowers ; regretted that the rugs had been rolled up; cast an almost wistful glance at the drawing-room door, closed, and most probably locked as well. It had stood open yesterday showing the gleam
H

of gilding on the frame of the Chinese landscape ; the glowing softness of a Persian rug ; the invitation of a low arm-chair at the side of a table where a bowl had stood filled with roses beside a small book-rack the contents of which he had not then had time to examine. He had an impulse to open the door; to go into the room; to pull back the curtains and open the window, to make it alive and friendly as it had been ; but he was conscious of Gawkrödger's eye watching him from the dining-room where he was putting the finishing touches to the dinner-table.

Feeling a trifle abject, Frome went upstairs.

7

It was nearly midnight when he laid down his pen. The house was still. The log fire on the hearth had died down and its whispering ashes made the only sound in the room now that the travelling of his nib had ceased. It had grown colder while he wrote and he got up to close the windows. From the wood around the garden there came the hooting of an owl; then the fright of its tiny victim was shrill for a moment and ceased. Frome shivered a little ; chilled by the night air ; moved by an instant's pity for the small life that had ended in terror out there in the darkness. His mind went back to his seventh

birthday, when he had chosen for his treat to be taken to the National Gallery and had protested with tears against the struggles of the bird clutched by the Holy Child above the expectant nose of a cat in Baroccio's *Madonna del Gatto*.

He had been writing about the golden chain which so often emphasises the nakedness of Lucas Cranach's Teutonic nymphs and goddesses, and it was his hesitation over reproductions of *Venus* in her huge red velvet hat in the Louvre and of *Charity* with her children in the National Gallery, to illustrate the comic charm of this ingenuous painter, which had made him pause in his writing with the intention of getting out photographs of both pictures in order to decide between them. His mind, deflected by the sounds of the owl's hunting, was back now in the past among memories of his mother, who had first taught him to look for such details in the pictures she herself enjoyed more for their human than their artistic interest. He had dedicated his *Simonetta* to her, and she had spent long days interleaving a copy of the book with the obtainable photographs of any picture or drawing named in it. He had the book with him now. It had formed the basis of a limited edition in quarto, illustrated with colour-plates published shortly before her death. The book had been fully subscribed before publication and

such copies of it as astute booksellers had bottled fetched double their original price when, one by one, they were allowed to come on the market.

A sudden wish to compare the photograph of the girl he had found on the desk at which he had just been working with the Medici reproduction of the head of Aphrodite used as the book's frontispiece, reminded him of Gawker's action. The earlier annoyance he had felt against the man's officiousness flared up again. With a courage born of the certainty that he was unobserved, Frome went into the drawing-room.

Snapping down one of the light switches at the door he noticed, with a recurrence of that approbation which had marked each stage of his growing familiarity with the house, that the lamps were all placed on tables, or on the bookshelves round the walls, so that the room was lit softly and not by the harsh falling of light from the ceiling. Just so, if ever he had a room of this kind in a house of his own, he would have it lit. It was the first time he had consciously made any plan for such an eventuality—the first time he had ever imagined himself in a house that was a home of his own choice.

As he made his way between the sheeted furniture towards the bureau, it seemed to him

that he was not alone. A presence, half wondering, half amused, appeared to hover just out of sight, as though grateful for the care of, and distressed by the disturbance made in, a place where it had spent so many contented hours. Why, it seemed to question, why have you rejected the very core of rest and welcome left for you here in a room that, till you came, was alive and happy ?

As if to reinforce the question, the bulb of a small lamp on one side of the fireplace gave the little hissing splutter of warning that its days were almost numbered. Looking in the direction from which the sound came, Frome noticed for the first time the radio-gramophone on which it stood. He went up to the instrument and turned a knob to see if it were in order. The indicator glowed yellow; there was a faint crackling and then the first stroke of midnight from Big Ben boomed through the air.

At the fifth stroke the little French clock on the bureau added its tinkle to the chimes ; at the seventh the grandfather in the hall began to clear its throat for its own proclamation. It was with something like a schoolboy's glee that Frome turned off the current. Gawkrodger had told him that there was a portable wireless set in the kitchen, but had made no reference to this one. Having discovered its existence, Frome

was armed with an unanswerable reason for saying he must have the drawing-room put into commission again. He liked to listen to a symphony now and then. If necessary he would write there. The study was the smaller room. He needed all the space there for the proper arrangement of his books and photograph-cases. He wanted to sit in the sun till noon and to listen to the nine o'clock news at night. He was still searching for more reasons for the order he had determined to give next day as he opened the bureau and took out the photograph he had come to find.

Ten minutes later he put the frame back and closed the drop-lid above it. Since he was going to work in the drawing-room there was no need to carry the thing back into the study again. It could stay where it was till the morning.

Gawkrodger received his master's instructions with equanimity.

"Yo can have fire i' room and there's an electric heater as'll do for stooody when yo're fussing wi' papers," he said. "Happen yo'll be going oop garden for a bit after breakfast, wile I set room to rights again."

Having gained his point so easily Frome accepted this suggestion with meekness and, seeing Ripley among the rose-bushes, stopped

to speak to him about the flowers and vegetables for the Harvest Festival.

" Thank you, sir/" said the gardener, " the young ladies generally cuts down the flowers something cruel for the Vicar. Miss Susan cleared the borders of as fine a show of Michaelmas daisies as you could see anywhere in the county last year and took most of the pink Japanese anemones as well. They could hardly get them into Miss Rita's car, what with the pumpkins and marrows I'd put there myself. With your permission, sir, I'll make it dahlias and Cape gooseberries this time."

Frome was surprised by his own pleasure at being asked for a purely nominal consent to the disposal of what after all was not his own property. He exchanged a few remarks about the weather (the gardener was inclined to think it would break before the week was out) and walked off to find himself, a few minutes later and without any conscious intention of going there, standing on the little lawn in front of the white pebbles that formed the letters of the name Susan.

Miss Susan and Miss Rita—those were the names the gardener had used. Susan was one of the daughters of the house. This experimental garden belonged to her. It was Susan who had heaped great sheaves of lavender and purple daisies into the car a year ago, and had starred

them with the paleness of just such flowers as were spreading their rosy petals on soft brown stalks along the wall above her name. All the flowers in this small garden were pale. Autumn crocuses stretched their translucent fingers outwards from their crimson-pollened centres in the grass : there was a froth of late-flowering sweet alyssum below the pink anemones. The hollyhocks were almost over, but they had all been white or sulphur-coloured. A tall row of evening primroses still offered their promise of unfolding at sunset. It was not from Susan's garden that the dahlias and Cape gooseberries would be taken for the church she had filled with softer colours last year. He had no wide knowledge of the times of flowering, but his mind went back through the seasons, seeing snowdrops and wild daffodils in the grass when the winter irises had ceased to bloom and recognising the grey-green foliage of the pinks he had noticed yesterday. Violas would be there and the frilled clusters of candytuft and narcissi before lupin and delphinium added their pinks and blues to the velvety carmine and gold of wallflowers and antirrhinum in May and June. The bank before him would be starred with anemones, white and rosy and purple, and with the little Florentine irises such as grow beneath the feet of Zephyr in the pictured *Spring*.

There were no roses here ; but on one side of the grass-plot Frome saw a curious standard bush bearing scarlet berries and small trumpet-shaped flowers, like branches of yellow coral, among its cup-like leaves. His ignorance was startled by the presence of blossom and fruit on the same stem, and he went across to see whether this effect might not be due to some creeper that had wound its flowering coils around another plant. Before he could be sure that berry and bloom were indeed the simultaneous output of one stem, a measured crunching of the gravel behind him announced the gardener's approach.

The sense of being interrupted in some clandestine rendezvous gave a rather jaunty self-consciousness to his enquiry :

" Isn't this rather an odd bush ? "

" It is that," said Ripley. " That's Miss Susan's woodbine tree. There bain't another such in the whole countryside. It's a mass of bloom in the spring and fair hums with bees. These little autumn flowers smell sweet enough but they're not so good as honeysuckers."

" Has it been here long ? "

" Matter of twenty-five years, I reckon. 'Twas here when Mrs. Adderley came as a bride, same as the moonlight broom over there. Miss Susan chose this side of the path for her garden when she was a little 'un, along of them two

bushes. Miss Rita now, she likes a bright garden. When she was little it was all scarlet geraniums for her, and red-hot pokers. Now she's fancying carnations, but she hasn't took that much interest in her garden since she got her car. Looks to me to keep it tidy for her in these days. You should see that broom bush in May, sir ; more like sunshine than moonlight to my way of thinking/

" I shall look forward to it," said Frome. "I'm nothing of a gardener myself but I hope to learn something about this one while I'm here."

Ripley was pleased. He offered to take Frome over to the vegetable garden to inspect the site of a salary trench he proposed to excavate next week, but Frome, who did not connect this financial-sounding feat with the planting of celery, said he would inspect the trench later on and went back to the house.

Gawkrodger had made quick work of removing the dust-sheets and spreading the rugs in the drawing-room. He had also let down the flap of the bureau and had arranged Frome's writing materials on it together with a box of the long Benson and Hedges cigarettes Frome smoked when at work, accompanied by matches and a heavy glass ash-tray which had been in the study.

The girl's photograph had disappeared.

CHAPTER III

I

SUSAN sat in the window-seat of the room she shared with Rita in the pleasant hotel where the Adderleys always stayed when in Paris. It looked out over the Tuileries Gardens ; but Susan was not enjoying the view. Her mother was taking her after-luncheon rest ; Rita had gone for a last fitting to a dressmaker in the rue de la Paix and was joining a Mrs. Ellerslie and her daughters at a tea-party from which Susan had contrived to excuse herself. Susan had two clear hours before her. She had locked all the doors of the room, including in her haste those of the hanging cupboard and the bathroom. The walls of French hotel bedrooms seemed to be made of doors and Morcomb had a way of popping in through one or other of them every half-hour or so, just, she said, to see that everything was all right.

They had been in Paris for three days and this was the first time she had been alone for long enough to make it safe to take the silvery

book out of the scarf in which she had wrapped it on the evening of their arrival. The furtive inspection she had made at intervals during the long drive from Le Havre had disclosed, not only signs of wear and tear in the delicate binding, but, and this was much worse, pencil notes in the margins and on the blank fly-leaves. It was out of the question to pretend she had bought the book herself. Besides, she hadn't had a moment in which to buy any book, and she had seen nothing like this one in Galignani's window, which she scanned each time they passed it in the rue de Rivoli. Rita was always in a hurry when they went out together as they had done till this afternoon. The longer Susan kept it the more impossible it would be to explain how she had come by the book and why she had not spoken of her find, or deposited it at once, as she should have done, at the lost property office.

The only course left her was to destroy it and books are not easy to destroy in a Parisian hotel where even the central heating is not on at this time of year. She might drop it in the Seine if she could get down to the quais or on to one of the bridges by herself, which was unlikely. If they had only decided to go to Geneva by the night train she could have thrown it out of a window in a tunnel—a horrid idea: but, by day,

and in a car—Susan imagined the scene there would be. Mrs. Adderley, who was sure to be awake in the back, would see her and think it was an accident and Rita would have to pull up, and she'd be cross about that, before any explanations began. Susan stopped this ghastly imagining. She must find an hour in which to see what the book was about; to make a note of its title, author, publishing house and price, if that were to be found, so that, if it were as good to read as it was to handle, she could destroy it somehow and go openly to a bookshop in Geneva and get another copy for herself.

And now that hour had come—two hours. One of them was nearly over before she looked up from the page on which a chapter ended.

It was the most exciting book she had ever read. The figure of Giuliano de' Medici, young, dark, fastidious, ardent, moving against the splendours of fifteenth-century Florence, overshadowed by the more vehement personality of the magnificent Lorenzo, his brother, the master of the city, almost the ruler of Italy, was presented from the outset as a creature more interestingly alive, more susceptible, more idealistic, because of the shadow that hung over his glittering life.

A paragraph describing his veiled and scornful face as it appears in the authentic portrait of

him now in Berlin, and tracing it, in a more glowing aspect, as the writer believed it to appear, in that same group of spectators in the *Adoration of the Magi* as contained the painter's own portrait, left her breathless with a communicated sense of its tragic beauty. If she could have flown to the galleries of the Uffizi then and there she would have done so. She was stung by remorse for her inattention to what had seemed to her the dreary rows of photographs of Old Masters which had hung in the corridors at school. This famous picture was almost certainly among them and she had passed it many times a day for three years without once stopping to see, as she *must* have seen if she had looked even for one minute, the haunting face that was celebrated in this clear and beautiful description.

She read on and came to the pages where the elaborate ritual of a great tournament was set forth in splendid and exciting detail. Giuliano was its hero ; but another figure rose before her eyes, as it had dawned on the senses of the tilting horseman in the lists of which this strange and wide-eyed girl was the queen.

Susan had not believed that real people, people in history, could be made to live again in a book that was not a novel like *Ivanhoe* or *Royal Flush*. Presently the dark and scornful

Giuliano and the soft, golden beauty to whom he made his knightly vows came together out of their separate frames and appeared in one picture after another, even as their names were joined in the verses which now broke the regularity of the printed page.

It was swiftly told, for all its sumptuous detail, this tale that was at once less and more than a love story. She, twenty-two and married ; he, a year older and already the lover of many other women, burned with a passion so luminous that the whole of their close, observant, ecstatic world was lit by its flame and they grew legendary in their youth, the archetypes of love and spring. The sensuous, intellectual awakening that poured the wine of Greece into the chalices of Christianity quickened in them and was by them made heady.

Susan was intoxicated by the tale of this recorded rapture. When it ended her tears fell for Giuliano as he saw the body of his dead mistress drawn on an open bier through the streets where, even in death, it was a festival to see the braids of her fabulous hair glittering in the Florentine sunlight.

The dreadful sequel was told quickly. Susan read on through the tortuous details of a plot she could hardly follow till it culminated at High Mass with the escape of Lorenzo the Magnificent

from the assassin, whose knife, thrust upward from behind, killed his young brother as he knelt at prayer.

The tale grew savage with revenge. The painter who had made so many drawings, studies, portraits of Simonetta, during the two years of her living fame, was commissioned to portray the dead assassins as their bodies hung from the windows of the Medici palace when Lorenzo had accomplished his revenge. It was, so the writer argued, while executing the horrid order of his patron and tyrant that the artist's nature had turned for relief to the vision of untouched bodily perfection and of the brooding innocence it seemed to house, which thereafter haunted his work.

This narrative and the conclusion Frome had drawn from it occupied twenty pages only of the entire volume : the second and major portion was devoted to an exhaustive scrutiny of every picture and drawing in which an etherealised Simonetta took shape as goddess or madonna or angel—sometimes alone, sometimes associated with the dark lovelocks and long fastidious profile of Giuliano.

Susan found the going harder in this second part. She had raced through the story in less than an hour. As she turned over the succeeding pages where the prose was broken by extracts of

Italian verse, she saw that she would have to read more slowly and with a dictionary. It would take her weeks to master it. She turned to the index with the intention of looking up every reference to Giuliano. Just above the capital " M " there was a reference to the Louvre. She sought for it in the text.

" The orange-robed Grace attending Venus in the frescoes from the Villa Lemmi may be studied in conjunction with the third Grace in the *Primavera*"

Susan looked out of the window and saw the crest of the palace, holding the smaller Arc de Triomphe in its arms. There was just time enough, before she would have to join her mother for tea at four o'clock, to walk across to the galleries and see this picture for herself. She had not been inside the Louvre since the days when she was taken there once or twice as part of that finishing of her education which had not been really completed in Paris. These visits had seemed so much less important, as they were less frequent, than concerts and matinees at the Fran[^]ais. Rita, who had been even more bored by the Louvre than she was, had refused any suggestion of what she dismissed as behaving like a tourist, on their subsequent visits to Paris. Still, Susan thought, she

could find her way to the Winged Victory ; after that it would be simple enough. There was no question now of throwing her treasure over the parapet into the Seine. She wrapped it again in her scarf, thrust the package under the still unpacked clothing in one of her suitcases, and went out to the lift, the historic sedan chair she and Rita had admired so deeply when they first stayed in this hotel as children.

It did not take her long to reach the fresco which, even to her uninstructed eye, was lovely, with its contrast between the swirling lightness of the immortals and the almost nun-like severity of the young bride whom they had come to salute. She stood before it ; drinking in the lovely quality of its pale tones ; rapt in the stirrings of a new aspect of beauty, a dawning perception of significances in painting other than those of the story a picture has to tell. Then the spell of the tale she had just read reasserted itself and she was eager to follow up the clue she had discovered and to add for herself to this visual evidence of one possible likeness, some confirmation of the other. An attendant at the door of the *Salle des Primitifs Italiens* directed her to the picture she sought.

It was disappointing not to be able to trace any resemblance between the Madonna of this painting, with her rounded forehead and long

narrow face, and the golden-haired dancing girl of the fresco. Susan supposed this might be because the model had posed in profile for one and was shown full-face in the other ; or, even more probably, because they were not intended to be portraits, real or remembered, of the same person. She would be better able to form an opinion about this when she had read and re-read all the rest of her book : it was, as she had seen, crowded with the names of pictures and of the people in them. Her head was so full of this new adventure into criticism that she did not notice for some minutes where she was going and that she had missed her way back to the staircase by which she had come. There were few visitors in this part of the building and no custodian in sight ; so she walked on, hoping that the next turning or arch would bring her to some spot she would recognise or some person to whom she could appeal.

Suddenly a door in the wall a few yards ahead of her opened and two men emerged from some private room or office. They were engaged in taking voluble and gesticulatory farewell of one another.

" *Au plaisir de vous revoir, Monsieur le Professeur,*" said one of them, bowing profoundly.

The other waved his hat with a large move-

ment that set the folds of the black cloak he wore swirling around his short figure.

" *A bientôt, monsieur le directeur*" he said with a strong English accent.

Susan, startled by this eruption of official life into the vacant corridor, stood still waiting for it to subside. The interchange of these gallic courtesies filled so much space that she would have been involved in them if she had walked straight on. In the few seconds of this pause she had time to be further startled. Though his back was towards her she recognised the little man who spoke with so English an accent and with so un-English an emphasis. It was the same person, wearing the same black cloak, as had surprised her three days ago at sunrise on the deck of the Southampton boat; the owner of the book she had only just begun to read.

Before she could collect her wits sufficiently to realise that here was an opportunity of restoring his property to him, the little gentleman had uttered his final reiteration of hope for a speedy reunion with his friend and, stepping out briskly, had disappeared into the entrance of a gallery lower down the corridor.

Honesty urged Susan to follow him, but disinclination made her pursuit so slack that, by the time she reached the gallery into which he had vanished, he had already left it.

Susan was relieved. She could not go rushing about the vast labyrinth of the Louvre in search of a person whose name she did not know in order to tell him that she had something he had lost, hidden at the bottom of a suitcase. Suppose he did not believe her, or, more dreadful still, suppose he did and insisted on accompanying her back to the hotel where they would almost certainly be seen by her mother, or by Rita, or by Morcomb—or by all three? She might lose, not only her book, but the secret which had gathered round it and was now full of a story whose threads ran in so many directions that it would take her years to follow them all.

It was, Susan told herself, as she made no haste to get out of the Louvre, it was all for the best.

In the rue de Rivoli she saw him once more, a figure easy to recognise in his broad-brimmed hat and long cloak, walking briskly across the street and making for the Palais-Royal. Perhaps he was going to the Bibliotheque Nationale: he seemed to be that kind of person. She walked on, when he had disappeared, and waited for a break in the traffic in order to cross to the corner of the rue Castiglione to reach the hotel.

As she stood there she saw her mother on the other side of the street. Mrs. Adderley had evidently taken a shorter rest than usual and gone out before tea. Susan timed her crossing of the

road exactly and joined her opposite the Hotel Meurice.

" Why, darling/' she said, " you do look so tired. Ought you to have gone out without either of your daughters to look after you ? "

There was a queer little pause before her mother answered her. She seemed almost as far away from Susan as Susan had been from anyone outside the Florence of Lorenzo the Magnificent ten minutes ago.

" Hello, Susan," she said at last ; " been sitting in the gardens ? "

" No," said Susan, feeling extremely virtuous and slightly hypocritical, " I've been to the Louvre to see some pictures."

Again that odd little pause.

" Did you . . ." began Mrs. Adderley and then, as if she had decided not to ask the question that came to her lips, " I hope you enjoyed it."

" Is there," said Rita that night after dinner, " is there any reason why we should stay here till Friday ? We've done all our shopping and this place is lousy with tourists and all the decent theatres are closed till the week after next."

" I'm quite ready to move on if you are," said Mrs. Adderley, " only Emilienne is not expecting us till the twenty-fifth."

" We can send her a telegram—unless we stop for an extra night or two on the road. We might go round by Chartres and Orleans and show the child cathedrals and things."

Mrs. Adderley hesitated.

" Are there any famous museums or private art collections at Orleans ? " she said with a trace of anxiety.

" Sure to be," said Rita, " but we needn't look at all of them."

"No, of course not," said Mrs. Adderley. " Still, I think we had better stick to our original plan and get away from Paris tomorrow."

" That wasn't our original plan, dearest—and we can't get off tomorrow because my dresses won't be ready till late. But we could start at daybreak the day after."

" And of course," said Mrs. Adderley, " it will take me all day to repack."

Her children were too much accustomed to the lack of apparent sequence in their mother's remarks to ask her why she could not leave this occupation to Morcomb, who could get it done in an hour; -but Susan, who had not spoken at all since dinner began, remembered the worried air she had noticed when she met her mother in the street that afternoon and thought that she seemed to have something on her mind.

2

Emilienne Winter had made every possible arrangement for the comfort of Basil's mother and sisters during their stay in the flat in the route de Malagnou. Mrs. Adderley was to have the smaller of the two spare bedrooms. It looked out on the garden and was sunny and quiet. The girls were to sleep in the twin beds of the larger room that had a view of the Saleve above the tree-tops. The furniture of the *petit salon* was augmented by a third easy-chair so that the in-laws could all sit there together if they wanted to be by themselves, or had the tact to leave her and Basil alone for an evening now and again. They were coming for a long visit and, though the sisters would probably go *off* for whole days at a time and be out a great deal with Marcel and his friends, it was only common sense to take precautions against those *crises des nerfs* which were so likely to occur in flats where six or seven women, including a temperamental cook, lived for several weeks at a stretch ; especially if there were a nine-days *bise*; or if it rained all through the last fortnight of October. *La bise*, that steady, penetrating, ice-chilled wind that blew the lake into waves and swept flocks of little sea-gulls inland to the shelter of the bridges at the first onset of winter, played very much the

same part in Emilienne's life as the devil did in those of wives and mothers in the Age of Faith. It gave her neuralgia, it made Basil cross and it might kill Bartolome if Miss Smith, his English nurse, took him out in it again without his woollen cap, as she had done in March, two days after her arrival. The *bise* certainly kept Emilienne's mother indoors while it lasted; but this relief from a daily trial in the form of visits was offset by an often hourly telephone call from the anxious grandmother. Emilienne hoped that the two grandmothers might consume a good deal of one another's smoke. They had been at the same finishing school when they were girls, though nobody would believe it who saw the obviously widowed Madame Lombart and the almost absurdly youthful Mrs. Adderley together for the first time. They had augmented their store of memories during Mrs. Adderley's quasi widowhood in Geneva as the divorced wife of Simon Winter in the early days of Madame Lombart's own marriage. They ought to have a great deal to say to one another. Emilienne hoped they would not be jealous over Bartolome, who had no tact in the matter of transferring or concealing his strong and expressed dislikes. She hoped that Miss Smith would not mind having her midday meal with Morcomb. Fortunately she had been able to find a room for her mother-

in-law's maid in a house nearby, so that breakfast and supper presented no difficulty and, as Alphonse the valet de chambre spoke English and Morcomb was said to possess a useful French vocabulary, unencumbered by syntax, Emilienne hoped almost with prayer that there would be no conflicts in the *Service*.

Basil's share in the preparations for the entertainment of his mother and half-sisters had limited itself to teaching Bartolome five new words which the child telescoped into three : *Grr-an muzz*, *Tanrrita* and *Tantzue*. He regarded these utterances as invitations to the dance. He was a great dancer, though he appeared to have no ear for music. For the past week he had hopped and tottered with outspread arms, up and down the corridors, in time to his own rendering of the names of the grandmother and aunts he was so soon to welcome. Madame Lombart, whom he called *Memee*, was sure that these English ladies would be ecstasied by the performance.

Everything being so well in hand so long before the twenty-fifth, when the party would arrive by car—probably in the late afternoon, Mrs. Basil Winter had no hesitation in going off to Berne with her own mother on the twenty-second for the wedding of a cousin. They would stay the night—the wedding was to take place

on the twenty-third and would occupy twenty-four hours, beginning with the civil ceremony at ten in the morning, followed by the religious one two hours later, and ratified by an enormous family dinner which would last until eleven o'clock at night, when the bride and bridegroom were to drive off to the chateau on the Murtensee which was to be their home. The programme was a long one, and Emilienne knew it would be lengthened at both ends by meetings with relatives she had not seen since her own equally extensive wedding festivities more than three years ago. Basil, who had just been made head of his department, could not go with her.

" This/" said Emilienne, " partakes of the nature of blessings. You, my cabbage, are bored with the aunts and cousins, and for their part they are jealous that I am married to an Englishman who speaks French with a Parisian accent."

" I shall have the boy's cot brought into our room for the nights you are away," said Basil.

" In that case perhaps I will stay three nights. Maman is staying for the rest of the week and Marcel will not return till the evening of the twenty-fourth. He will bring me in his *voiture*. It is quicker than the train. I shall be well home for dinner on Wednesday. Maman has decided to go on Sunday night after all."

" Right you are," said Basil. " They'll let

us have a wire about the time, and they'll probably not get here till the twenty-sixth in any case. My mother has the vaguest ideas about dates/

" I'll ring you up as soon as Louis and Clara have gone," said Emilienne, " and you can tell me what your people say in their telegram."

" If they send one," said Basil.

Basil was fond of his wife—nearly four years of marriage had left them still quite reasonably in love with one another and much better friends than they had been during the months of adjustment that followed their long honeymoon—but he was not sorry to see her go off to Berne for two days and nights, and very glad that she had not insisted on his getting leave in order to accompany her.

The beautiful smoothness with which his home was run; the absence of fuss; the admirable service; the excellent table Emilienne kept; her intelligent following of public affairs; her flair for the last word in dress and decoration had their less comfortable offset in the strictness of the regime under which Bartolome was brought up. Regular hours, a carefully balanced diet, unrelenting insistence on fresh air had brought the child through the two years of his life in magnificent health. He was

sturdy, cheerful and obedient, and though, like most boys of the same age, he was not yet a fluent talker and inclined to mix French and English into a language of his own, what else could be expected of him seeing that both languages were spoken in the household? He had walked on his first birthday and, on his second, had danced round the grand piano in the *salon* while his mother played tunes from the Dalcroze book of Eurythmic instruction. It was all most gratifying. At the same time there were hours when Basil wished he could have his son to himself.

He was going to see as much as possible of Bartolome for the next two days. Miss Smith should go for the final tour of the lake on the last boat of the season on Wednesday. It would take all day and Basil would take a day off too—with Bartolome.

Miss Smith, informed of this project, said that, if Mr. Winter didn't mind and could make it Tuesday, she would prefer to go by train to Lausanne and spend the day with friends there. This was not very convenient, as Basil knew he might be needed for a committee meeting between twelve and one on Tuesday morning; but Miss Smith pointed out that Bartolome always had his sleep at that hour and manifested such acute symptoms of being *more*

than willing to forgo the little holiday Mr. Winter had so kindly planned for her, that Tuesday it was.

Basil spent Monday rather crossly in disarranging the plans he had made for the week. When he got back from the League of Nations Palace in the Ariana Park on Monday evening he found a telegram :

Arriving Thursday lunch time. Love.

This put him into a good temper and he rang up Emilienne at Berne to tell her that all v/as well. Emilienne had so much to say about the preparations for the wedding next day that she did not ask Basil where the telegram was sent from, and Basil did not have time to tell her that Miss Smith was going to Lausanne, before she rang off.

Basil took Bartolome with him when he drove Miss Smith up to the Gare de Cornavin to catch the nine o'clock express to Lausanne on Tuesday morning. They then walked out to the lighthouse on the jetty to give the child exercise and fresh air, and indulged in a form of conversation which consisted, on Bartolome's side, of a reiteration of the word *pourquoi?* and on his father's of increasingly complicated answers in words of one syllable.

" Try to say ' why ? ' old man," Basil suggested, partly because *pourqiioi* was getting on his nerves and partly because he always talked English with the child.

" Pourquoi ? " said Bartolome.

" It is the English for *pourqiioi*, Tolo."

" Pourquoi ? " said Bartolome.

" Say it. Say 'why?'"

" Vi," said Bartolome.

Basil had obtained a moral victory at the price of losing the thread of the conversation. He had been in the middle of explaining something to his son and now he had forgotten what it was.

" We'll walk to the end of the jetty once more before we go back to the car," he said cheerfully.

" Pourquoi ? " said Bartolome.

It was only ten o'clock and Basil had already abandoned the hope that he would find a message when he got in to say that the committee would not meet that morning.

He stopped to buy a postcard of the jetty at a cafe on the Grand Quai and gave it to his son to hold, saying :

" We'll write to mummy when we get in and tell her where we've been."

This prospect left Bartolome cold. The concept was not on his intellectual plane. After a

moment's silence he announced the pursuit of a new theme.

" Miss Smiss," he said in a loud voice. " Miss Smiss."

" Miss Smith's gone to Lausanne."

Lausanne meant nothing to Bartolome.

" Miss Smiss/" he reiterated. " Miss Smiss, Miss Smiss, Miss Smiss/" and he began to wriggle *off* the seat.

" Be quiet, Tolo! " said Basil, hauling the child back with one hand. " Look at your post-card—there are birds on it. Sit back and keep still."

They had reached the Rond-point de Rive where a congress of tram-cars seemed to be holding a kind of tournament. Basil's attention was fully occupied with traffic problems for some minutes and he did not notice the silence of his companion. An intermittent spitting noise he put down to some vagary of the carburettor.

" Cheer up, Tolo," he said as he turned the car up the route de Malagnou, " we'll be home in a minute."

Bartolome made no answer. With dreamy abstraction he was engaged in chewing off the fourth corner of the postcard of the jetty and the *mouettes*. There were crumbs of cardboard in his eyebrows and smudges of the chalks which had been used to colour the picture lay, green

and pink, about his nose and chin.

Basil was inclined to telephone for the doctor, or at least to give the child an emetic ; but Alphonse, who came out to the car as they reached the door of the block of flats, had been a father himself and said that the customary glass of milk at eleven, before the customary nap, would be all that was needed by way of antidote, unless, indeed, this eater of postcards could be persuaded to let his teeth be brushed by an unpractised hand.

Bartolome, who had not enjoyed his meal, most of which he had spat out immediately, allowed his teeth to be brushed and drank his milk with the air of accepting his supposed sufferings courageously. By a quarter to eleven he was lying in his cot on the balcony, with the nursery door ajar in order that Alphonse could keep an eye on him while his father was attending his committee.

Half an hour later Alphonse was called away from the task of polishing the panels of the hall door to answer the telephone. It was his master ringing up to say that he would not be able to get back to the house for luncheon.

It took Basil two or three minutes to satisfy himself that Alphonse quite understood what care must be taken of Bartolome until his father's return, and Alphonse devoted another

ten to discussing the changes of arrangement with Marianne, the cook. The kitchen was at the end of a corridor set at right angles to the one into which the main rooms of the flat opened, and Marianne having just brewed herself a pot of mid-morning chocolate, Alphonse decided to join her in drinking it. Frieda, the Swiss-German housemaid, had been sent out on an errand : the moment was indicated for a quiet chat. The valet quite forgot that he had left the front door standing open.

So when Professor Winter emerged from the lift opposite the door of his son's *appartement* he did not indulge in the formality of bell-ringing. It would make his surprise visit completely surprising to enter unannounced. So far as he remembered, his daughter-in-law's little morning-room was entered by the third door on the right.

The third door on the right, when opened, disclosed a room which had been altered in its purpose and in the arrangement of its furniture since Simon Winter had seen it nearly three years ago. Through the half-closed shutters he noticed a child's cot and a small single bedstead. On a rug in the middle of the floor a small boy with a remarkably well-formed head was seated building a tower of bricks.

" Good morning," said Professor Winter

pleasantly. The child placed a firm hand on the top of his tower and, looking at the newcomer out of a pair of large blue eyes, said :

" Tolo up."

" But only half-dressed," countered the Professor.

This remark made no impression.

" Tour d'Eiffel," said Tolo, and went on building.

Judging that, if he stayed where he was, the surprise of any person who discovered him in the child's room would be even more complete than he had planned, Simon Winter sat down. Someone was bound to come in before long. He rather hoped that his grandson (this must be his grandson) might be alarmed at his advent and begin to scream.

But the child appeared unmoved by the presence of strangers. He was building a tower and, for the moment, had no attention to spare for an elderly gentleman, however strange. The boy knew what he wanted. He also possessed the technique of making uninvited guests feel their position ; he was unmistakably Emilienne's child.

For three or four minutes neither of the occupants of the nursery spoke. Then, having placed his last brick on the top of an already tottering edifice, Bartolome lowered his large

and handsome head and butted. The scattered bricks now served their owner in the office of rats or rabbits which he, transformed into the nature of a dog, pursued on all-fours with the barks and growls proper to the chase.

" Good dog ! " said Simon Winter, entering into the spirit of the game. " Pick 'em up. Look ! One's hiding under that chair."

Encouragement had the effect of destroying Bartolome's interest in rabbiting. He dropped the flat brick he had caught and put into his mouth and, still on all-fours, charged straight at the visitor.

" Hi! young man. Don't knock me over. Do you know who I am ? "

This time the child heard and decided to enter into direct communication with his interlocutor.

¹¹ Grr-an-muzz ? " he suggested.

" Not at all, not at all," said Simon Winter, shaking his head.

" Tanrita, Tanzoo," Tolo finished his lesson.

Having no key to this statement, Simon Winter supposed it was a nursery incantation and waited for some addition to it.

" Vont venir," said Tolo.

Defeated by his grandson's mixture of early English and broken French, Professor Winter resorted to bribery. He fished in his trompr-

pocket and producing a handful of coins extracted a five-shilling piece, one of several he always carried about with him as mascots.

Bartolome accepted the curious offering and put it straight into his mouth. Finding that it was harder than the foil-wrapped disc of chocolate for which he had, quite naturally, taken it, he clenched the object between his teeth and began to scream.

It is one thing to hope that a child will scream and quite another to sit still while that hope is fully realised; besides, the creature was getting very red in the face and showed traces of foam at the mouth. If, in his passion, he were to swallow the silver crown, the surprise his grandfather had planned would lose its enjoyable nature. Simon Winter believed that the proper course to take with a child about to choke was to hold the sufferer up by the heels and shake it until the foreign body in its throat were dislodged. But Bartolome was now lying on his stomach, kicking vigorously, and his screams had settled into a steady roar. There was nothing for it but to go for help.

The hall was full of people and suitcases. Simon had left his luggage with the concierge, who had now found time to bring it up and deliver it to Alphonse ; Marianne and her minion Frieda, a girl from Zurich, who spoke

no language but her own scratching Schweitzerdeutsch, were all converging on the night-nursery, their advance impeded by the bags and rugs now slithering over the parquet.

Frieda, whose maternal impulse towards the son of the house had hitherto been thwarted by Miss Smiss, overcame all obstacles and, pushing aside both her superiors, reached the prostrate child and took him in her arms before either Alphonse or the cook had time to explain to one another that the intruder was *le pere de monsieur*, and not the thief or kidnapper they had at first decided he must be. The concierge, reiterating his justification that though the baggage might be lacking in feminine elegance it was all labelled WINTER, hailed its owner with a loud cry of triumph.

With the cessation of Bartolome's cries a silence fell on the three servants and Professor Winter was able to make himself heard.

" Mrs. Winter is not at home ? " he asked with complete dignity.

" Madame is absent but Monsieur will return after *dejeuner* " said Alphonse.

" Then I must lunch alone," said the Professor.

" Bien, monsieur." Then, recollecting that his master had received a telegram earlier in the day, he added that Monsieur le Professeur's

arrival was not expected until Thursday.

Simon expressed no astonishment.

" Then my room is not yet prepared ? "

On the contrary, everything was in readiness, only the flowers Madame had commanded had, naturally, not yet been placed in either of the rooms. Would Monsieur le Professeur desire that Alphonse should unpack for him before luncheon ?

Simon accepted this suggestion; handed his keys to the valet and retired to wash in the lavatory without inspecting either of the two rooms so curiously ready for his visit. It would be amusing to discover for whom these preparations had indeed been made.

At two o'clock Basil Winter, returning with anxious haste from the other side of the lake, found his son perched on his grandfather's knee engaged in the time-honoured amusement of blowing open the glass of the flat, gold repeater watch Simon had inherited from his own father fifty years ago.

The next half-hour was spent in a duel of wits from which Basil emerged the victor in so far as he had evaded the elder man's oblique enquiries about the preparations for his unannounced visit. Emilienne would be home to-morrow and would know how to deal with the

situation. Meanwhile he was quite pleased to see his father and did not propose to spoil an amusing companionship by speaking of the Adderleys. He had indeed, on the few occasions when he had been in Simon's company so far, never mentioned his mother, nor had Simon enquired about her : this, thought Basil, was on the whole tactful, or possibly just callous. In any case Basil was not going to be the first to put an end to his reserve.

There was, however, another subject of some delicacy which Basil had forgotten.

" I have not," said Simon, after Bartolome had been sent to play in the gardens behind the block of flats in charge of the enraptured Frieda, " I have not yet seen where you and Emilienne have hung my little wedding gift. Has she found a place for it in her drawing-room ? "

" No," said Basil. " You see, sir, neither Emilienne nor I really understands pictures. We have been waiting for you to advise us. The drawing-room has three windows, as you may not remember, and double doors into the *petit salon*, as well as two doors into the hall. There is no wall that will take it. Blaste has done a fresco for us at one end—we can't hang it over that—and the whole colour scheme is ice-pink and silver, which makes it impossible."

" Almost too many good reasons," agreed

Simon. " What about the dining-room or this very pleasant study of yours ? "

" That," lied Basil, " is a point we thought you could decide. As the picture was a gift to us both I felt I could not shut it up in this room where Emilienne never sits, and we do not think the lighting of the dining-room good enough . . . also this room is on the small side."

" I suppose it has had to go in one of the bedrooms."

" No, not exactly. You see, when it came, the crate was too large for it to be brought up. It had to be unpacked in the basement. As a matter of fact it is still there."

" Good God, Basil! Not mouldering in the damp ? "

" This is quite a new building. The basement is as dry as a bone."

" Probably far too dry. Is it properly aired ? "

" Perfectly ventilated. We store lots of things there. Our trunks and several quite valuable pieces of furniture given us as wedding presents."

" And unsuited to Emilienne's colour scheme."

" Quite. One has to be so careful in a flat—even in a comparatively large one like this of ours. Rooms open into one another and ..."

Basil floundered on, multiplying excuses in

a vain attempt to conceal from his father the increasingly evident truth.

Simon Winter had never supposed that his gift would be regarded as anything but a nuisance ; he listened with pleasure until Basil, having run out of ideas, attempted to change the subject by offering him a fresh cigar.

" Not now," said Simon. " After dinner I shall enjoy another. Meanwhile, to return to the Ribera. You may not know that collectors are interested in all Spanish painting at present in consequence of the possibility that one or other of the political parties in Spain will make a holocaust of everything in the country on account of the growing habit of setting fire to public and private buildings. Your picture therefore has a market value considerably greater than the sum I paid for it two and a half years ago."

Basil, who had been given to understand that the Elijah was not even a copy of one of the master's known works, found it difficult to answer this. After a pause for the reply which did not come, the Professor went on.

"If it were possible to persuade you and Emilienne to part with my gift, I happen to know a dealer who would be prepared to buy it from us immediately. As a matter of fact he will be in Geneva this afternoon. It was with the view of asking you to allow him to see the picture

that I made my descent on you."

Basil made no attempt to hide his delight at the news.

"It is," said his father, "a pity that the picture should not be hung in a place of honour so that we could make some show of reluctance on your part to relinquish it. Still, that might be remedied. So long as it was not to remain in her colour scheme I don't suppose Emilienne would object to having it in the drawing-room for a couple of days."

"We might fetch it up and have your friend in before she gets back," said Basil. "I dare say Alphonse and the concierge could manage it."

They discussed this possibility and went into the drawing-room to decide on the best place for displaying the masterpiece.

"We'll go down and look at it presently," said Simon, "but I think I'd better write a note to Dubois and get it sent down to his hotel to let him know I've got him the refusal of the thing."

So Simon went off to his bedroom to find Monsieur Dubois' letter in his despatch-case and to write a note asking him to telephone as soon as he arrived.

"Better get it over before Emilienne comes home," he said, abandoning the pretence that Mrs. Winter's consent would be essential before the picture could be sold.

Basil rang for Alphonse and found him ready to do his best, if the concierge were free, to get the picture upstairs, though as he pointed out it was not going to be easy to bring so large an object through the front door of the flat and into the drawing-room, seeing that the lobby between the two doors was only six feet wide and might not allow for turning the frame.

" We'd better measure the space now, before we go down/" said Basil.

This business occupied some minutes, and half an hour had gone by before Basil went to tell his father that he was ready to take him down to the basement.

Simon Winter had not only written his letter, he had also unpacked a great many papers which were now disposed on the little writing-table, and had changed into a lighter suit. The clothes he had worn on arrival were now thrown untidily on one of the twin beds. Seeing how completely his father had taken possession of the room, Basil cast a fleeting and anxious thought towards the problem of dislodging him before Thursday—before tomorrow evening, if possible. He did not want Emilienne's return from her own family party to be complicated by the situation in which Simon might involve them all.

However, the immediate present demanded full attention. Once the business of getting rid

of Elijah was over, he could, if necessary, tell his father exactly why he must leave the flat, without even waiting to see Emilienne.

Down in the basement they found the concierge quite ready to help Alphonse, and as the framed picture was far too large to go up in the lift Basil and his father stayed behind while the two men carried it up the main staircase. One of Emilienne's aunts had died, leaving her a very fine Dutch porcelain stove which was stored in the basement with other objects of less interest. Professor Winter was delighted to find that its tiles were decorated with the story of Susannah and the Elders, in blue and white medallions, taken from a series of woodcuts illustrating the Apocrypha, by a German artist of whose work he had made a special study. When they had verified and admired this coincidence the two men went up in the lift, only to find that Alphonse's fears had been realised. The picture was wedged across the lobby of the flat, and the landing echoed with the cries of the concierge within, directing Alphonse outside the open door, and with the valet's replies and remonstrances.

Deciding that they would be of more use inside the flat, Basil and his father went round to the service door and made their entrance by way of the kitchen into the dining-room. There

was no sign of Marianne, the cook, in the servants' quarters ; but sounds of great volubility in the corridor seemed to indicate that she was advising on the crisis at the front door.

They crossed the dining-room and saw, through the glass door that gave access to the *petit salon*, the figure of a woman in out-door clothes coming in from the hall. For a moment Basil hoped that this might be Emilienne come home a day too soon. As he followed his father into the room he realised that the worst had happened.

" Why, Simon ! " said Madge Adderley. " You must be as surprised as I am. Didn't you get my telegram, Basil ? Or is this a surprise for me ? "

" Your telegram said Thursday/ "

Basil kissed his mother on both cheeks in French fashion and then she returned the salute as if helping him to mark time for a second longer.

" How stupid of me, Basil ! I meant Tuesday. It is Tuesday today, isn't it ? " she said with both hands still on his shoulders.

" You never did know which day of the week it was, Madge," said Simon.

A voice from the door called :

" Mother ! Our bedroom is full of a man."

Rita came in, followed by the cook who was wringing her hands and saying at the top of her voice :

" Quel malentendu ! Que dira madame ? "

Mrs. Adderley began to laugh. In the babel of excuses, apologies and explanations that followed nobody except Simon Winter heard the little cry of astonishment and recognition which parted Susan's lips, or saw her as she appeared on the balcony outside the window for a moment and then went back, by the way she had come, to the bedroom littered with a strange man's belongings.

" Would you mind, Mother, if I didn't have tea in the *salon* ? "

" Have you got a headache, Susan ? "

" Y-yes," said Susan faintly.

" You never have headaches," protested Rita.

" You're just making a situation. It's the very thing Mother doesn't want us to do. After all, if she doesn't mind why should you ? "

" Rita is quite right. We must think of Basil."

" Why of Basil ? "

" Well, Rita. It is a little awkward for him. Emilienne is away. We've arrived two days before we were expected. And the front door is jammed with that picture."

" He needn't go out by the front door," said Susan.

" That man doesn't mean to go out by any door until the picture is on the wall/" said Rita, " and I don't see why he should. Besides, somebody's got to pack his bags. Even if you *have* a headache—which I don't believe—tea will do you good."

" Couldn't I have it in here ? "

" Don't be silly, child. As Rita says, we don't want to make things seem worse than they are. Your . . . my . . . well *Simon*, will go off to a hotel presently and then we can forget all about him."

" You know, Mother," said Rita, " I don't know that I want to forget all about him. I thought him very nice and amusing just now and not at all flustered."

" He always was amusing," said Madge Adderley, " and the only thing to be flustered about is that picture."

" It sounds as if they'd got it in at last," said Rita, going to the door of the smaller bedroom to which they had all retired for a breathing-space while the rest of the household dealt with the blockade in the hall. " Yes ! Now we shall have tea. Come along."

Mrs. Adderley put her hand under Susan's elbow.

" You needn't mind, darling," she said. " I haven't, for more than twenty-five years. He came and went long before I ever met your own father."

" It isn't only that, Mummie," said Susan : but it was not possible to tell her what else it was as they went along to the drawing-room in the wake of Alphonse and the tea-tray.

With the calm of despair Susan heard her mother say :

" Simon, this is my younger daughter, Susan."

" How do you do," said Simon Winter, and held out his hand.

Susan just managed to look at him as she returned his greeting and was relieved, and also alarmed, by the stony lack of recognition in his face. It wasn't that he had not recognised her ; he had, and he wouldn't admit it. She looked at him again. This time there was just the faintest flicker of one eyelid ; he was warning her not to say she had seen him before.

She had escaped the fuss and the complicated explanation which had seemed inevitable ; but, as she sat half hidden in a *bergere* from the group round the low table where her mother was pouring out tea, Susan began to wonder whether it was not worse to be the accomplice of this very peculiar old gentleman than it would be to stand

up, then and there, and say she had met him already—met him twice, though he did not know that—less than a week ago; she had almost spoken to him in Paris. If she had not been encumbered by a very sticky *petit-four* full of almost liquid candied cherries which squirted when bitten, she might have made her confession, but before she had obtained control of the wayward morsel she heard her mother, in a spasm of tactful chatter, ask:

"Have you been travelling about much lately, Simon?"

"I've just come back from Spain, Madge."

"Did you get mixed up in any of the Revolution?"

"Not a bit of it. It's purely local. Things were quite normal in Madrid."

"I thought," said Mrs. Adderley, "that there was something about street fighting on the placards at Dijon this morning."

"That was yesterday. I was well over the frontier by that time. I only went to verify the ascription of this picture."

"It seems hardly worth the long journey and the risks," said Mrs. Adderley, looking with distaste at the prophet and his chariot of fire.

"As I was telling Basil, his picture proves to be one of which they have the preliminary cartoon at the Prado. Fortunately the finished

work was taken out of the country some forty years ago. I hope to convince Dubois of its authenticity tomorrow."

" You know, sir," said Basil, " if it really is so valuable as all that, I wonder if we ought to part with it."

" You'll not have much choice once Dubois has seen it," said the elder man with what Susan couldn't help thinking was a rather hollow laugh. " Now that we've got it up I can quite see why Emilienne did not want it in this ultra-modern room."

" It is a bit of a snorter," said Rita. " Why don't you put it in the nursery ? Tolo would adore all those prancing horses."

" I'm not so sure," said Basil. " They used to terrify the concierge's kid. That was another reason why we kept it downstairs. I don't think Tolo has ever seen it."

" Let's show it to him when he gets back from his walk."

" No, Rita," said her mother. " It might give the child a nightmare. Several, in fact. And if he takes a fancy to it it will be all the more difficult for Basil to sell it."

" I rather think my father is going to sell it whatever Tolo feels about it," said Basil. " What bothers me is how we are going to hang it without messing up Emilienne's wall."

" It seems so odd," said Mrs. Adderley, " to have all this metal tubing about and no picture rails."

" There shouldn't be any difficulty about borrowing a stand from the Picture Gallery here," said Simon. " I know the Director. I may as well get him on the telephone about it now, before the place closes for the day."

" The telephone's in my study," said Basil. " Shall I come and get the number for you ? Or ring him up myself ? "

" No, no, my boy. I can manage. I'll ring up the Hotel des Bergues and see if Dubois has arrived. Book a room for myself there at the same time."

When the door had closed on her ex-husband Madge Adderley set down her tea-cup with an audible bang.

" Basil," she said, " your father is up to something."

" Probably," said Basil; " but what ? "

" Look at the second horse from the right. The legs are out of drawing," said Mrs. Adderley with the air of one who explains everything.

" The whole picture's a fright," said Rita. " I can't imagine anyone wanting to buy it."

" That's what I mean," said Mrs. Adderley, " and Simon has not come straight from Madrid."

" There was a perfectly fresh Hotel Bristol label on one of the suitcases in our bedroom," said Rita. " I noticed it because it's exactly the colour of one of my new pullovers."

" So long as he sells the thing I don't see that we have anything to worry about," said Basil.

" But it is worrying. You can't make money out of it Basil."

" My dearest, I shall not make a penny. You don't suppose he's going to hand over the booty to me."

" I believe he's sold it already."

" No. No. His Monsieur Dubois wouldn't buy a pig in a poke."

" That's a good name for it," giggled Rita.

" Poor Monsieur Dubois," sighed Mrs. Adderley.

" Look here, Mother, you mustn't let your conscience spur you into warning this Dubois person. He's probably well able to take care of himself—and, in any case, we are not certain—and even if we were ..."

" I am quite certain, but I shall be out of the way when it happens," said Mrs. Adderley ;
" and, if I were you, Basil, I'd go out too. Your father will expect you to tell all sorts of lies for him."

" About what ? "

" About everything—about his having come straight here from Madrid."

" Darling," said Rita, " we don't know that he hasn't."

" I do," said Mrs. Adderley. " And so does Basil."

Basil was spared the necessity of either accepting or repudiating this statement by the entry of Simon himself. He was in high spirits.

" There will be no need to drive nails into dear Emilienne's beautiful fresco," he announced, " or to send to the Musee for a stand. The good Dubois has left his client in a nursing home and will conduct the purchase himself. Since it is now past five o'clock and the light begins to fail, I will join him at the Hotel des Bergues—and tomorrow, at eleven o'clock, he will come to view the Ribera by daylight."

The relief was general. Mrs. Adderley and the girls went off to find Bartolome, and Basil devoted himself to the welcome task of getting his father out of the flat.

" I'm afraid I can't be here at eleven in the morning," he said as he drove Simon down to the lake-side half an hour later. " But you won't need me. Make any arrangements you like for taking the picture away from here. All I hope is that it won't be stuck in the doorway again when Emilienne comes home."

" Even if it were," said the Professor, " so long as it was being taken away I gather she would have patience."

" I'm glad you recognise that, sir."

" Well ! Well ! Tastes differ. Say goodbye for me to your mother, my boy. I'm glad to have met her again. She is very little changed. Still slim and pretty at fifty—or is it forty-nine ? And so like a kangaroo in her conversational methods ! "

3

Basil was safe in his magnificent room at the Palais des Nations. Emilienne had telephoned last night to say that she was returning that morning from Berne, but that they must not put off *dejeuner* for her, as she might lunch on the way. Rita and her mother had gone to shop in the Corraterie and the *rues basses*. Bartolome and Miss Smiss were out walking; Susan had started with them, just as her mother and Rita were leaving the house, but, once they had reached the Tranchees, she had pretended that she wanted to look at pictures in the Museum and, as soon as she dared, had retraced her steps in haste. Now she was back in the room she shared with Rita, persuading the not reluctant Morcomb to go out and change her money, an operation she always liked to conduct herself in

any fresh country they reached.

" I'll finish my own unpacking, Morky," urged Susan. " You go out and look at *the jet d'eau*. It doesn't play every day. You can see it springing out of the middle of the lake from one of those little bridges. Alphonse will tell you where to get Swiss money. It's only half-past ten. You'll be back long before mother comes in."

" I'd have you know, Miss Susan," said Morcomb, with a sniff, " that I've got a map of the place and have no need of advice from a foreign butler as to where I go or what I do when I get there. Finding my way in a small town like this is child's-play to Paris, and the language is the same."

" Of course it is ; and Morky darling, you're so clever at shopping, will you get me a pencil with a rubber at one end, and "—Susan paused, searching for some further commission to send Morcomb further afield—" and a little note-book, one of those with wire at the back, so that you can tear out a leaf—you know the kind."

" My intentions were to go out this afternoon, Miss Susan."

" It's going to rain this afternoon," said Susan, " and Rita wants you to fit the shoulders of that pink dress so that she can wear it tonight, I think," she added, appealing in her desperation to Morcomb's annoying habit of regarding

every young man they met as a possible husband for Rita. " I think Madame Lombart's son is coming to dinner/ "

" Have it your own way," said Morcomb, yielding to this invention of the moment. " I've put your things in the wardrobe and Miss Rita's in the *placard*, as they call it here. Don't get them mixed the moment my back is turned. I couldn't unlock your small suitcase, so that's still to be unpacked."

" I know where the key is." Susan glanced anxiously at her wrist-watch. It was incredible that only three minutes had gone by in argument with Morcomb, who now, though on her way out of the room, had stopped to pick a thread from the sleeve of the coat Susan had just taken off and thrown over a chair. In twelve minutes, if they were punctual, the visitors her mother had gone out to avoid would be in the flat, and she must have disinterred the silver book by then.

Morcomb was gone at last. There was no time to waste in making sure that she had really left the building. Susan sat on the floor; unlocked her suitcase ; burrowed under its contents for the book and for a pencil and writing-pad with which to make the notes she needed in order to accomplish her intention of buying another copy for herself, since it was

now possible for her to return his property to the owner.

She had just begun to write the address of the Paris house which published the Guillemot books when there was a sound behind her and Morcomb's head, hatted and veiled, appeared round the half-open door.

"In case you've forgotten, Miss Susan," she said, "I'd better warn you that Mr. Winter senior is expected here to see that picture of a saint there's been all the trouble over. Don't get absent-minded and find yourself in the drawing-room while he's there, which poor Madam has gone out to avoid."

"All right, Morcomb," said Susan, glad that the raised lid of her suitcase made a screen to hide her preparations for the very encounter against which she was being warned.

Susan stood up and listened to Morcomb's footsteps as they died away along the corridor outside. She had planned to be in the *salon* when Professor Winter arrived and to get the little interview over quickly, without any reference to the Channel crossing which he had tacitly forbidden her to mention yesterday. She knew that, for some reason connected with that frightful picture, he had said he had come straight from Madrid, though nobody seemed to believe him. She knew also that the price of

his silence was her own. She wondered how he had been so sure that she had not told anyone of their meeting on the Southampton boat. She had no experience herself of the instantaneous decisions, the gambler's skill in reading faces and taking risks, which had carried Simon Winter through other and far more difficult encounters. She knew that Rita would think it disloyal to her mother to have anything to do with Basil's father, though it was all right for Basil to be polite to him. It was, so Susan told herself, just because she wanted to put an end to the very peculiar acquaintance she had with her mother's first husband that she had involved herself in such a mesh of lies and double-dealing this morning. What she did not tell herself was that, somewhere, just below the surface of the thoughts and reasons she admitted, there lived a desire and a memory; a desire to know more about the author of the book she had not yet read through ; a memory she was trying to thrust deeper still of what that author must by now have discovered on the writing-table in the study at Maze House.

Last night at dinner Basil had asked his mother about the tenant Mr. Vulliamy had found for her and, when she told him that it was a writer called Frome, he had said :

" Oh, that fellow ! My father was talking

about him this afternoon. Says he's written some sort of book about the Medici and is quite a big gun in his way."

" He's writing another now, at Maze House," Mrs. Adderley had said ; " and he's fond of cats."

" How's Isaac, Susan ? " Basil had asked, and they had begun to talk of things that had nothing to do with the writer none of them had ever seen.

It was while the others talked that Susan's way had become clear to her. Rita and Basil remembered their childish jokes and games. Basil told stories of Bartolome's reincarnation of some of his own early likes and dislikes ; Mrs. Adderley enquired about Marcel Lombart's decision as to the choice of his career, a matter on which Madame Lombart had written to her earlier in the year ; and, all the time, Susan was making up her mind to be at home next morning and selecting hook and crook by which to bring this about without letting anyone suspect her intention or know that she had seen and spoken with Simon Winter alone, and not for the first time.

From her babyhood Susan had known and accepted without resentment her position as odd man out in the family. Rita with her vivid beauty, her alertness, her gay common sense, was her

mother's favourite, Basil's playmate and ally. Susan had sometimes felt like a changeling who did not belong to the people with whom she lived. She had overgrown her strength in her early teens, and the burden of her tallness, her straight, heavy, yellow hair and the stooping shoulders she had only been strong enough to correct lately, had combined to make her for some years the ugly duckling she still felt herself to be. Madge Adderley was far too nice a woman to be guilty of deliberate unkindness or injustice. She understood the child, whom she considered to be stupid as well as rather delicate, well enough to see that she was not bullied by the elder children, and, later on, not to interfere overmuch with her day-dreaming love of solitude. Four years at finishing schools near London and in Paris had done a great deal towards changing the lanky, silent girl of fifteen into a graceful young creature who, though she did not talk much in company, was able to take part in general conversation without making a fool of herself. At times Susan's mother was quite startled to see how lovely her pale child could look. She was glad to find, after Susan's return from Paris six months ago that, though Rita teased her sister sometimes, the two girls were now great friends and shared many little interests and occupations with affectionate understanding.

Mrs. Adderley did not know that Susan's quietness marked a hidden life protected, as it had been for years, by the silence under which she cloaked her dread of ridicule. She would have been shocked if anyone had told her that her younger daughter—who sat so quietly, smiling, at the dinner-table in Basil's flat—was involved in a course of deliberate deception on which she had entered a fortnight earlier. She would have repudiated indignantly the suggestion that Susan had been almost driven into ways of secrecy from her earliest years. She would have been blankly incredulous if she had been warned of the entanglement into which the girl had already drifted and was, even now, planning to make more serious.

Susan stepped out on to the balcony which ran along the whole of the block and went, as she had gone yesterday, towards the drawing-room. Outside the first of its three long windows she paused. Voices were engaged in rapid conversation inside the room. Men's voices. One of them was, by now, only too familiar; the other, speaking English with a French accent, was undoubtedly that of Monsieur Dubois. She was disconcerted by this failure in the course of the arrangements she had made with herself, being too inexperienced in the craft of planning to

know that other people seldom, if ever, carry out the schemes, made by a solitary plotter, in all the details it is so easy to arrange in imagination and without consulting the enemy.

Susan had been sure that Professor Winter would arrive a little after eleven; and he had clearly arrived several minutes before that hour: she had been sure he would come to the flat alone in order to see that the shutters and sun-blind were properly drawn so that the picture would be lit to advantage before Monsieur Dubois arrived; and he had brought that gentleman straight in without any precautions to mitigate the shock a first sight of Elijah and his horses must be, even to the most hardened picture-gazer. She had meant to be in the *salon* reading the book she now carried unopened in her hand as she stood outside the window, so that when Simon Winter came in she could say, "You dropped this in the station yard at Boulogne last week," and to leave him with it while he waited for his friend. And now Monsieur Dubois, who believed that the Professor had come straight to Geneva from Madrid, was there, and it would be impossible to explain how she came to have the book. It did not occur to her that she might restore the thing without an explanation, or that its owner was far too clever to compromise himself by asking her for one.

Susan had kept her own counsel often enough, but, until yesterday, she had never worked with an accomplice. She had not learnt to depend on any wits but her own in the emergencies of deceit.

She might go back along the balcony and get through one of the *petit salon* or the dining-room windows, into the hall; leave the book with the Professor's hat and cloak and then disappear. But in this scheme she was hampered by her only half-admitted desire to see and speak with him again. She could not be sure that Simon Winter had left his cloak in the hall; the day was so fine he might have come without it; in any case, how was she to distinguish one masculine hat from another—especially foreign hats? Also, she was likely to meet Alphonse in the hall, hovering there between the visitors' arrival and departure.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, the thing she had planned for Simon Winter to do took place, but not at the moment for which she had fixed it. He came to the window saying, " We'd better have more light. The sun has gone in." Flinging back one of the half-closed shutters he stepped out on to the balcony where Susan, in her alarm, now stood, her back to the wall, her arms outstretched in an instinctive effort to flatten herself into the angle of one protecting shutter.

The sudden overclouding of the sun brought with it a touch of east wind. Susan fought for a couple of seconds against the threat of a sneeze, only to yield to it far more noisily than she need have done. The little convulsion shook the slippery, silver volume from her grasp and it fell, landing at the feet of its owner, who had stepped out on to the balcony to the accompaniment of a second even more shattering sneeze.

" Aha! " said Simon Winter, " so the goddess is subject to mortal weakness. The wind from Lac Lemman is chillier than the airs that breathe over the Ionian Sea."

" I do wish," said Susan, pulling her handkerchief from the sleeve of her jumper, " that you wouldn't talk about goddesses."

This was not at all the speech with which she had intended to begin the interview; nor was the dive she made to recover the fallen book included in her plan of action, which was finally wrecked in the collision between her head and Simon's as he made a like effort.

They stood up together, holding the book between them.

" You dropped it at Boulogne," said Susan, " so I had to wait, because of Madrid."

" What," asked Simon, ignoring these geographical references, " what have you done with the rest of the family ? "

" They've gone shopping. At least my mother and sister have. Your family is out too. Till *dejeuner*."

" One moment," said Simon, and disappeared into the *salon*, leaving the book in Susan's hands. She heard him arranging to meet Monsieur Dubois at their hotel in an hour's time, and, as she listened, remembered that Emilienne might get back from Berne at any moment. From her own experience of those who travel by car, she knew that this arrival would probably be later rather than sooner. There was not much risk of immediate interruption. In any case her own plan had broken down : she was now in the hands of a plotter of far more experience and accomplishment than herself.

The sounds of Monsieur Dubois' leave-takings died away, and Simon Winter reappeared on the balcony.

" This seems to be rather exposed a place for our conference," he said, " unless for some subtle purpose of your own you have chosen to keep me suspended above the earth and in the heaven you carry with you. You remember Mistress Elizabeth Drury—to whose person Paradise adhered, as courts to princes."

" No," said Susan, " I never heard of her. She sounds rather grand."

Simon warbled :

" . . . *Her pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheeks and so distinctly
wrought
That one might almost say her body
thought*"

" Poetry," said Susan.

" By the Dean of St. Paul's."

" Oh! " said Susan. " Which one ? "

" The greatest of them all."

" I know. He wrote *Aire and Angells*. It's almost my favourite poem."

" Then you ought to know the *First and Second Anniversarie*"

" I only know one or two by him. They're in a little anthology I read in bed. I've left it behind me at home."

" Poisonous things, these snippet books."

" This one isn't. It's the kind of book I feel I've made for myself."

" In that case it must partake of the divine perfection of Mistress Elizabeth Drury."

" Was she one of John Donne's friends ? "

" It is not believed that he ever saw her ; but he made his most splendid poem about her, after her death; much in the same way as the young jackanapes who wrote that book in your hand would have us believe that Botticelli went on painting Simonetta Vespucci—painting her naked, too—after she was dead, when he'd

probably only set eyes on her dressed up to the nines when he was commissioned to paint her portrait."

" But," protested Susan, " he saw her often in Florence, at the tournament—and then her funeral procession——"

" You've read the book, I see."

" Only the story part—and a few pages of the rest. I've not had much time to myself since—since I found it."

" Once more I venture to suggest that you should come indoors. We have not a very long time in which to cover a good deal of ground, especially as you go on sprinkling the conversation with poetical extracts."

The unfairness of this accusation took Susan's breath away, and she followed Simon into the drawing-room without a word.

" On the whole," he said, pausing in front of the Elijah, " I agree with my daughter-in-law. Lo Spagnoletto's style of painting is wrong for this room. In fact it makes it completely uninhabitable. We should be more comfortable, as well as more secluded, in your brother's study. I have never liked this continental habit of having glass doors between rooms. Makes one feel like exhibits in a museum."

In the study Simon Winter produced a case and offered Susan a very thin cigarette made of

very black tobacco rolled in semi-transparent paper, saying :

" I hope you don't smoke."

" I *can*" said Susan; " but I needn't if you'd rather not."

" That's the first time you've reminded me of your mother. The dark one's her daughter all right, but you might easily be a changeling. Perhaps you are."

It was too bad of him to be so rude in such a cooing voice and with such a mild and beaming look. Susan knew that he deserved to be told that she was considered very like a great-aunt on her father's side who had been tall and thin and yellow-haired and had died young. This would have been a quelling thing to say ; but, even though he had brought her mother into the conversation himself, Susan could not snub him by speaking of her own father, so she kept silence for a moment and then remembered with panic how the headmistress at Southernwood had explained, in one of her lessons on good behaviour, that the best, in fact the only, way in which to register disapproval of another person's remarks was to make just such a pause—and then to change the subject, or, if circumstances allowed of the manoeuvre, to turn away and speak to someone else. At the time Susan had supposed that never, never would she

be able to put this advice to use; and here she was doing so without even trying ; doing it in confusion, by accident, with the intention of *not* snubbing.

" Oh ! " she said, " this isn't a bit the way I meant this conversation to go."

" Entirely my fault," said Simon. " And now let us make conversation according to plan—to your plan. I have—or had—none, not knowing that the gods were to be kind to me again."

" What I meant, when I got back in time to see you while the others were out, was just to give you your book, and to ask you about it, and to say that I haven't told anyone how I got it—and I don't want to."

" So that's the agenda."

" There was a bit about Madrid, too."

" Why about Madrid ? "

" Well," said Susan, rather wide-eyed at this, " I thought it was important, because you had not been there. You see, I was in the Louvre last Wednesday at half-past three."

" And no ambrosial breath warned me of your presence."

" No," said Susan. " I held my breath till you had gone."

" And kept your own counsel."

" If I'd known then who you were—I mean

that you were Basil's father—I might have said something. But—well I didn't—and then yesterday—oh ! you know quite well what happened yesterday."

" To be quite ffank with you, Susan—I may call you Susan, I think—I was a little puzzled by your obvious reluctance to claim acquaintance when we met again. It did not occur to me that you were being chivalrous."

" I wasn't. I was thankful that you were pretending you hadn't come straight from Paris, and from England, so that I needn't tell that I hadn't told."

" Your need, in short, was greater than mine : but mine no longer exists. The worthy Dubois accepted the picture and will sell it to his client as by Lo Spagnoletto."

" I thought it was a Ribera."

" Two names for one painter. I have been to Madrid, many times. The actual date of my last visit is of no importance now. Unless, of course, you wish me to keep up the pretence you have unmasked for your own reasons."

" It would be much simpler to say nothing either way," said Susan, " even if you were going to see us all again."

" My own feeling," said Simon, " is that it would be tactful not to do so—not at present."

" Not ever," said Susan. " Won't you take

your book and go now before Emilienne gets back ? I don't think I could explain being in here with you, to her—or to anyone/

" Listen ! " said Simon, "it's chiming the half-hour. Half-past eleven. We can allow ourselves another ten minutes. You said you wanted to ask me about this book of mine, and I haven't thanked you for restoring it to me. As you will have noticed I had been using its fly-leaves for notes."

" Yes—that's why I knew I mustn't keep it for my own."

" Did you want to ? "

" Oh ! " she sighed. " I've not finished reading it yet. I'm going to get another copy. Will they have them at the bookshops here ? I've looked for the silver binding on every book-stall since we got to Paris."

" You won't see it. This is a special presentation copy—made as a sort of Christmas card for people like me."

" Did he send it to you ? "

" Who ? Tony Frome ? No. I'm about the last man to whom he'd send it. I don't suppose he's got more than one copy of this edition himself. You can't take it into England."

" It says so on the cover. I noticed that. Doesn't he like you—the author, I mean ? "

" I shouldn't think so. I cut his book to

ribbons, when it came out, in the *Painting and Literature Quarterly*. They made it a leading article out of my review."

"How *could* you ! It's a most wonderful book—and so beautifully written. Some of the sentences stay in your mind like poetry."

"Quite so ! Quite so ! It's very well done. But the theory of it is fantastic ; cuts across Home and all the other johnnies. And the *Quarterly* is always down on these popular successes. Macdermott wanted someone to have a go at this one. He's editor *and* proprietor. I had no choice."

"He must be a very horrid man."

"He is a bit of a ruffian."

"It's like Keats and *Endymion*" said Susan, lost in indignation. "Just the same :

*I said the Quarterly
Savage and tartarly.*

No wonder he wanted to hide away from everybody."

"Hullo ! " said Simon. "Do you know the fellow ? "

"Only from his book," said Susan, catching her breath.

"I know he's gone to earth somewhere, and I rather want to find out where."

"So that you can go on persecuting him ? "

" On the contrary. I could put him on to something he'd be only too glad to know about."

For a moment Susan was on the brink of telling him where his victim was; and then she remembered that to do so would be a double betrayal and that her mother was the only person who had the right to let Simon Winter know where she, too, had taken refuge from the memory of what he had done to her. The coincidence filled her with a dazzle of joy and fear. It drew her one step nearer to the person, as yet unseen, but already so closely felt that she was glad to be able to keep a secret for him, as she had for so many days kept her own secret about him. She did not notice how long the silence had lasted until he broke it by saying :

" I can easily get at him through his publishers."

There was a pause in the scurry of Susan's alarm. Even if he did write to Mr. Frome ; even if he went, at Mr. Frome's invitation, to see him at Maze House, there was no reason why Simon Winter should find out that this was her mother's home. Then she remembered. If he went there, even for a day, he would be bound to go into the study ; he could not fail to recognise the photograph : everybody said it was exactly like her.

To her horror she began to blush, slowly, completely. She felt the hot tide burn her cheeks

and spread till it reached her forehead ; stinging her eyes with tears ; creeping down over her chin ; staining her neck so that she had to move her head restlessly from side to side as if to account for or to quell the flush. When she saw that Simon was watching her with interest, his face like a pink moon against the dark leather of the chair in which he leant back smiling; at his ease; amused; observant, she felt she would never stop blushing : then her anger rose and she grew pale. It was horrid of him to stare at her. Kindness, politeness even, should have made him look away, but he was neither kind nor polite ; he was a dreadful man.

" You know, Susan/" he said, taking off his spectacles and polishing them as though he, too, had grown hot with shame or some other emotion, " I never wanted to be a father. I don't feel like Basil's father ; but I wish my relationship with you were not so complicated. I think we might have had an interesting and profitable time together, interesting for me, profitable for you, if I could have watched you grow up."

" If you could have, I should never have been born," said Susan. All her resentment had crumbled as he spoke; without it she felt suddenly helpless, apologetic even. There was regret in her voice.

" You see," he said, " we understand one

another. We get into the same kind of difficulties. We have already kept silence about one another. It's a great bond."

" But we can't have a bond," Susan protested. " And I wish I did not have to keep secrets. You never know when they will explode."

" You don't keep them so well as you think you do," said Simon. " I know yours."

" I told you. It was half your own."

" Not that one. That is *not your* secret, but just a little, harmless adventure about which you preferred to keep silent."

" I—I—haven't any other," she stammered.

He put on his spectacles, curling the gold wire of their stalks round his ears with deliberation, before he spoke again. Then still smiling as though he savoured a rather subtle joke he said :

" Tony Frome is a romantic idealist. He's done for the legend of Giuliano and Simonetta what Tennyson did for the *Morte d'Arthur*', brought it into line with his own—or to be accurate, his mother's—outlook on sex. He'd be a better art critic if he were not a sentimentalist. If I were your father I'd forbid you to read his book. As it is I warn you that his ideas are hopelessly old-fashioned."

" Then," said Susan, recovering from the first bewilderment at this sudden change of subject, " it is a good thing you are not my father, be-

cause, if you were, I should probably have to tell you that your ideas were quite out of date, even in my mother's time—about forbidding girls to read what they like, I mean."

" No girl with the face of a Botticelli Venus ought to be able to read at all," said Simon.

This time his meaning was so clear that she did not mind his return to the bantering reference which had bewildered her hitherto.

" Do you really mean that I am like—like those pictures ? " she asked.

" Go and look at yourself in any mirror."

" But..." began Susan, about to confess that except for the two pictures she had seen in the Louvre, neither of which reminded her in the least of her own face, she had no clear image of any portrait, direct or imagined, of Simonetta with which to complete the comparison.

Before she could formulate this explanation the door opened and Alphonse came in to announce that two men and a van had arrived for the purpose of removing Elijah from the premises. His master had told him, before leaving the house, that this relief would probably be accomplished before *dejeuner*. Was he right to allow it to be set in action ?

" Certainly ! Certainly ! I'll come and make sure that the men have Monsieur Dubois' instructions," said Simon, getting out of his chair.

" I do hope it won't be stuck in the front door again when Emilienne comes back/" said Susan.

" These men," explained Alphonse, " have brought ropes and sacking with intention to lower the work of art over the balcony."

" Well, I'll escape by the main entrance while the going's good," said Simon. " Goodbye, Foam-born ! Go back to Olympus and read John Donne. He's a better writer than Anthony Frome."

" Darling," said Madge Adderley later that afternoon, " I did not know you had gone shopping too, this morning. Did you have enough money ? "

" Morcomb did my shopping for me," said Susan. " I haven't settled up with her yet."

" She's got oodles left," said Rita. "I borrowed twenty-five francs from her after luncheon."

" Morcomb ought to charge you two interest on what she lends you," said Mrs. Adderley. " Did you get any Swiss money when you were out, Susan ? "

" No, Mother. I went into the Museum to look at pictures."

Susan hoped this half-truth would get her round the corner which was all the more awk-

ward because she had not the faintest idea what was on the other side of it.

" Pity we missed Morky in the Corraterie," said Rita. " I'd have given anything to hear her ordering Susan's books at Georg's."

" I suppose Susan wrote her out a list of what she wanted."

" All the same ..." began Rita, and then Emilienne came into the *petit salon* to say that Tolo had insisted on having his bath in his father's bathroom, in order to accommodate all the toy ducks and fish and floating dolls his grandmother bought for him in Paris, and would like them to witness the display.

As they passed through the hall Susan saw a large flattish parcel on the table and stayed behind the others to examine it. It bore the label of the Librarie Georg in the Corraterie and was addressed to : *Mademoiselle S. Adderley, chez Madame Winter, 101 route de Malagnou.*

Half an hour later, while Rita was having a bath, Susan cut the flat, ribbon-like fastenings of the parcel she had carried into their bedroom and stripped its contents of those sheets of uncut galley-proof with which booksellers wrap up their more costly wares. There were two books inside the wrappings. One was a small, thick, narrow volume in yellow boards, anybody's copy of the silver-bound *Simonetta*

she had given back to its owner that morning : the other was large and sumptuous and heavy with colour-plates, the Phaidon Botticelli, hot from the press.

There was no inscription in either book : no card fell out from the wrappings she turned over hastily in search of some such sign ; but Susan was not in any doubt as to the identity of the sender.

CHAPTER IV

THE golden stillness of Summer lingered. By drawing no breath, she prolonged her resistance to the shadow that closed down earlier each evening and was later in every morning's retreat before the sun. In the rose garden the September flowering bloomed so wide that each separate rose spread its petals away from the yellow dust of the stamens, as if it had lived beyond even a second childhood and were now regaining the form of the briar from which it came.

*"Ah, no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose"*

quoted the Vicar, smoking his own much-cherished briar, in the garden of Maze House after luncheon.

"Ripley tries to cut them for the house, but my man won't pamper me to the extent of arranging flowers," said Frome. "I was driven yesterday to filling a bowl with those Madame

van Blombergs myself. Have you any idea, Vicar, how extraordinarily difficult it is to get roses fixed in a bowl ? They all drop in the centre and drown themselves. And fishing them up again is no joke. I imagine the first idea of making barbed wire must have occurred to some poor chap who'd been told off to sort out a bunch of roses."

" I dare say. We are apt to take the worst hints from Nature. But have you noticed that, when they breed to produce fewer thorns, these rose-growers do away with the scent as well ? "

" I know nothing about roses—or gardens/' said Frome. " What was that poem you quoted just now ? "

" One Susan Adderley used to recite when she was about five years old, with two long pig-tails of yellow hair hanging down to the hem of her absurd little frocks. It begins : *Very old are the hills*. It used to give me a queer feeling to hear that baby, with the dew still in her voice, lilting out speculation on antiquity. Most children of her age spouted ' *When we were very young* ' ! I know my own did, though I believe their mother selected their poetry for them."

Frome was sorry that the Vicar's mind had drifted in the direction of his own children ; it was unlikely now to return to that other child

about whom he would so willingly have heard more ; about whom he found it impossible to ask questions.

He had dined at the Vicarage two or three nights earlier and had met the Vicar's children : a son, now grown to the age of pimples, and two, apparently older, but almost indistinguishable, daughters, who had just left school: this seemed to be rather a pity: school was so clearly the right place for them. Frome did not want to hear anything about the Vicar's children—he knew enough already—but there was no help for it.

" My elder daughter, Marion," the Vicar was inexorable, " wants to go on the stage. She did very well in the part of Sir Toby Belch at a performance of *Twelfth Night* given in this very garden, Mr. Frome, in June. A difficult impersonation for a young girl/

" Very," agreed Frome, wondering who had played Viola.

" My second daughter did not take part; that is to say, she helped with the dresses, but she does not care to act, being slightly deaf, which makes things hard for her—and indeed for others—cues, you know, and that sort of thing."

" Is there much dramatic talent among the young people here ? " It was as near as he

could get to the question he would not ask.

" A fair amount. Rita Adderley was quite good as Maria. Quite good." Clearly the star part had been Sir Toby.

" Who played Malvolio ? " asked Frome, a dreadful fear clutching at his mind.

" We cut that character out," said the Vicar. " It presented difficulties in an entirely feminine company. The mad scene, you know, is rather painful and—well, the drinking scene too."

" Didn't the continuity of the plot suffer ? "

" Not at all. You will remember there are two plots. We concentrated on the four main characters: on the love story, in short. It was very pretty—very pretty indeed. Sir Richard Brampton's twin daughters played Viola and Sebastian. It was in fact on their account that the play was selected. I was able to make the acting version for them myself. A most interesting thing to do, I assure you. People were most kind about the result. Quite a little triumph it was."

" It must have been," said Frome with dreary politeness.

" Susan Adderley was a problem," said the Vicar, now launched on a complete reconstruction of his success. " Being so tall and fair it was only natural to cast her for Sir Andrew Aguecheek. But the girl, although she speaks beautifully, has no comic talent at all. She

couldn't *touch* the part. After two rehearsals we had to give her Olivia."

Frome made no comment: his ears were filled with the rushing fall of iambic rhapsody :

*Holloo your name to the reverberate hills.
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out, " Olivia ! " O ! you should not
rest . . .*

" As I was saying," broke in the pleasant voice at his side, " the great success of the afternoon was Marion's Sir Toby."

The weather broke that night. A south-west gale blew in from the Atlantic. At dawn the horizon, which for weeks had been an unbroken line of blue against the blue of the channel waters that washed the marshes, was tossed into a foam-flecked greyness under the giant clouds. They filled the spaces which had been a blue emptiness all day and had become a cup to hold the rosy wine of the sun before twilight and after dawn during the fortnight since Frome had been at Maze House.

At noon the wind died down into fitful gusts and the clouds, driven more slowly, released their long accumulations in rain that fell with the steady violence of cataracts, or was blown against the hillside in great splashes of water as the

tempest rose and fell. It was no sort of weather for walking on the downs. Gawkrodger pointed this out when serving Frome's luncheon.

" You'll not be takkin' constitutional this afternoon/' he said, " so Ah'll run motor bike into Weston and look round me a bit."

" Not a very good day for the road."

" Ah've seen worse. Wind's dropping."

" Right you are, Gawkrodger. I'll keep house, though I don't suppose anyone will try to get up the hill today."

" Ah'll be back, come sooper time. There's tray set in kitchen. Yo' can mash your own tea."

" I may go out myself if the weather clears," said Frome. " Where do you keep the latch-keys ? "

Gawkrodger told him, and before long a louder note was added to the noise of wind and rain outside as the vehicle to which, in the course of years, its owner had made alterations and improvements of his own (none of them included a silencer) started an imitation of a dozen machine-guns in simultaneous action, heralding the onset of its hardly less deafening journey.

Half an hour later the noise of the last explosion had died away and it could therefore be assumed that Gawkrodger had reached the high-road. Frome knocked out the ashes from his pipe and took up the current issue of the *Burlington*

Magazine. He threw a couple of fresh logs on the red coals in the grate. But the wind still blew smoke down the chimney from time to time, though less chokingly than it had done earlier in the day, and his eyes began to smart as the wood took fire. Isaac, who had been asleep in a chair, woke and stretched himself, sticking his claws into the padded seat and lifting them out of it one by one with a tearing sound that roused Frome's attention, reminding him of his responsibilities.

" I say," he said, " I don't think you ought to do that."

Isaac fixed a green and steady stare on a point between Frome's eyebrows and continued his exercise.

" Get down ! " said Frome.

Isaac stood up, arched his back, and, waving his tail in slow defiance, ripped on.

Frome laid down his pipe and twisted himself out of the depths of his chair. Isaac waited until his opponent had crossed the hearth-rug, then leapt under his outstretched arm, and, landing on a stool covered in *petit-point*, buried his claws in that.

" Drat the drawing-room furniture," said Frome. " Come on, Isaac. We'll go into the study."

This proposition was welcomed by the cat,

who reached the door before Frome and waited there for it to be opened for him. Once in the hall, however, he decided to go upstairs, and having nothing of great urgency to do at the moment Frome followed the creature's lead. It did not lead him far. A gleam of sunlight from between the wind-blown clouds lay across the broad, low sill of the landing window: Isaac decided to sit in it and to begin a violent scratching of his left ear with a hind-paw; an uncomfortable operation to watch, as is well known to all cats.

Being half-way up the staircase Frome remembered that, since his first perfunctory survey of it, he had not been into any part of the upper floor except the bedroom and bathroom in the east wing where Gawkrödger had established him. The sense of being alone in the house made him restless. The silence, in which it should have been easy to work, lacked that assurance of human efficiency in the background on which he had come to depend for the freedom of his mind. Once again, as on the day of his arrival, he became aware that his presence, though welcome there, was still alien, and that, if only in thought, the place was haunted by the lives of those to whom it had, for so long, been a home and a possession. He wondered if there were some room he had either not seen or had

forgotten in which the people who knew the house in all its possibilities had been in the habit of taking refuge when the storms of spring and autumn blew smoke down the chimneys of the living-rooms below ; rooms that were so friendly, so happily lived in through sunny weather, as he knew ; rooms that might be so warm and glowing through the still cold gloom of winter.

He left Isaac to the gymnastics of his toilet and went up the staircase leading to the west wing.

The large twin-bedded room over the drawing-room had a faint air of owing its little touches of comfort—string-box and blotter; footstool; painted ash-tray and two slightly wistful water-colour landscapes on the wall—to church bazaars and gift-bestowing aunts : it was, Frome saw at a glance, the spare bedroom Gawkrödger had quite rightly refused to let him occupy. A man, thought Frome, would need to be very happily married if he were to sleep well, even for a night, in a room so femininely planned for connubial occupation. Women, thought Frome, as he closed the door and went on down the passage, were devilishly intimate in their arrangements : they insisted on knowing what you wanted better than you did yourself and,

in the very attention they paid to your private comfort, contrived to invade that privacy by reminders of their thought for it. The perfect hostess, who left her guest alone for hours, surrounded by everything necessary for his amusement, was as great an egoist, and a far more subtle one, than the woman who insisted on entertaining him with chatter about herself. The more alone you were in a really comfortably furnished house, the more you were obliged to speculate about the owner.

He reached the end of the passage and came to the corner where a narrower corridor, at right angles, gave access to more bedrooms and a second bathroom. The corridor ended in a doorway occupying the width of the passage. This was probably the room the windows of which he had seen from the garden: they looked east and north and would therefore be sheltered from the prevalent gales. If she had as much sense as he was obliged, on the evidence, to allow her, this Mrs. Adderley had, in all likelihood, made this room into the quiet retreat for herself, with which, in imagination, he had already credited her. He kept up this half-resentful speculation on the unknown woman's character, using it as a screen for that other quest on which he would not yet admit he had been engaged ever since he entered the house. His will was indeed sa

defensive that it clouded his imagination. In pretending that he did not think about one girl he forgot that both she and her sister had been children not many years ago.

As he opened the door his forgetfulness was corrected. This room, far away from the rest of the house, at the end of a passage ; this large room into which the morning sun would shine, against whose windows the storm that still shook the front and side of the house was powerless ; this room in which children might laugh and shout when they were good and happy, and stamp and scream when they were neither, without disturbing the grown-up people downstairs ; this room into the quietness of which he now shut himself, had once been the nursery. It was still not entirely converted or submerged by the schooldays which had passed through it, leaving a large globe in a mahogany stand in one corner and two school desks facing one another in one of the window recesses. Frome wondered which of the two children who had worked there had been made to sit with the light coming over her right shoulder.

The high nursery fender with its brass airing-rail reminded him of foggy days in his own London childhood when he had stood by just such another fire-guard, no taller than himself in those days, alleviating the boredom of indoor

life by pushing his fingers into the black wire meshes and finding the dawn of manly self-control when it hurt him to pull them out again and he managed not to cry. Little girls probably never thought of pressing soft finger-tips into the crinkled spaces of the network that stood between them and the blaze from the bricked well-fireplace, a modern addition, so much more cheerful than the black-leaded grate of his own nursery.

Turning away from the fender he saw a proud rocking-horse of dappled grey, fixed in an immobile prance on curved scarlet rockers whose colour matched the inner rouge of his wide nostrils. Someone had edged its harness with alternate gold and orange balls of coloured glass. They looked like the spoils of a Christmas-tree which had probably stood on the orange linoleum covering the floors and matching the gay linen of the window curtains. Frome was giving to his examination of this room the same careful and deductive attention as he had for years brought to the appreciation and analysis of works of art. Just as he had learnt to fix the approximate date of a portrait from the dress and ornaments worn by the sitter, and to form his own opinion on the disputed ascription of a picture by an analysis of the artist's palette and brushwork, so now he exercised the acquired gift of detection

on this room where, apparently, a boy as well as two little girls had spent their childhood.

Girls, so Frome believed, did not usually have rocking-horses. He had had one himself; but the daughters of the family next door with whom he used to play had nothing so manly in their equipment. They had had a doll's-house which he had at one time envied. He looked round this room but there was no doll's-house in it. A glass-fronted cupboard contained three shelves of books. On the bottom shelf half a dozen dolls dressed in the peasant costume of various nations were set on stands and appeared to be quasi-educational objects. The books, too, had the appearance of valued possessions rather than of much-read friends. They were mostly large, gaily bound, illustrated editions of nursery classics—*Alice in Wonderland* ; *The Child's Garden of Verse* ; *The Wind in the Willows* ; all the Christopher Robin books; *Peacock Pie* ; a modern illustrated long set of Maria Edgeworth ; Arthur Rackham's *Peter Pan* ; Grimm and Hans Andersen, and the blue, green and yellow *Fairy Books* by Andrew Lang ; *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* ; *The Princess and the Goblins*—all the old staggers in new editions, giving no clue to any one individuality ; the books chosen by aunts and uncles who remembered what had pleased them in their own time—and to little girls. On the top shelf a

less well-preserved set of bindings seemed to indicate the reading of the owner of the rocking-horse, the boy of whom, so far, he had heard nothing : *Robinson Crusoe* ; *Tom Sawyer* ; *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*; *Ivanhoe*; *The Alps from End to End*] *A Ride in the Balkans*; *Captain Cook's Voyages* ; *Prescott's Conquest of Mexico*, illustrated by Keith Henderson. If these were a boy's books he must be an elder brother of the two girls. He remembered now that Mr. Vulliamy had spoken once, quite vaguely, about a married son who lived abroad. In any case the books were a haphazard collection and yielded no evidence of any personal taste or individual bias. They were in their way as correct and obvious as the sets of Trollope and Miss Austen; the modern novels, and the works on gardening, needlework and china and glass, downstairs in the drawing-room; pleasant, unadventurous completions to the furniture of a house in which reading was a minor preoccupation.

The small library of books on military history and tactics, which, with the Oxford English Dictionary and the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, occupied the shelves of the study, had evidently belonged to Captain Adderley and had not been added to since his death at least fifteen years ago. It was strange how faint the traces of this man to whom the

whole place had once belonged now were ; most of them had faded away from it altogether. Even the Vicar, who had chatted so freely about the family yesterday, had made no reference to him.

Turning from the bookcase, Frome noticed that here too, as elsewhere in the house, there were few pictures on the walls. An Underground Railway poster which had been popular in the early 1920*8, showing a coloured map of London filled with buildings and small grotesque figures, hung in a wooden frame painted in the same bright shade as the curtains and chair-covers, between the windows on the north wall: but in a recess beyond the fireplace a long frame of grey wood was divided into sections each holding a woodcut. He went over to examine these more closely.

Once more he was taken back to his own childhood. The little pictures were Walter Crane's illustrations to *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, seven of them framed together in one long line. He remembered how these same leaves had grown loose in the greenery-gallery Grosvenor Gallery binding of his mother's cherished copy of the book—kept in a drawer of her writing-table and taken out when he came down for the hour between tea and bedtime, when she would read to him, or play a tune for him to sing to from the Kate Greenaway book of Nursery

Songs, which was another relic of her own childhood.

For years he had forgotten them. He stood now, recognising each once admired detail of the little borders above and below the main picture. The twisting briars above the picture of Rosamund, still asleep in the meshes of the hair that had grown to her knees during a hundred years ; the head of Falada, the talking horse, brooding over the Goose Girl, golden-haired also, who unbraided her locks so that they could blow in the wind while she sang, urging it to blow Conrad's hat away and make him follow and leave her in peace. He rediscovered Faithful John, perched on the back of the chariot that carried his beloved, while his breaking heart snapped the belt he wore; and Rapunzel, letting down her heavy tresses. The collection included the Nettle-weaver, seated on her unlit pyre, waving above her head the magic shirts which were to turn the ravens who wheeled about her into seven knights armed for her deliverance. For a moment he could not find his memory of the tale, then it came back to him, flecked with the mitigation of its happy ending : *as she had not had time to finish the last shirt the seventh brother went with a bird's wing instead of a left arm for the rest of his life.*

For the first time, he looked at the drawings,

accepted without question for their narrative quality when he had been most familiar with them, and now presenting themselves to his instructed and critical eye for other estimates. As he did so he began to wonder whether his own interest in Pre-Raphaelite painting had not received its first impulse from these little works by an artist nurtured in the school of Burne Jones and William Morris; the illustrator of so many books which had helped to popularise their visual theories in the days when his mother was young. Was it because his baby eyes had seen and accepted with enchantment the falling waves of Rapunzel's hair; the snaky flying of the Goose Girl's locks, that he had been moved so profoundly by the figure of Truth in the *Calumny of Apelles* ? Had Walter Crane's drawings prepared him to be enchanted by each Venus and nymph characterised by the same uncoiled, unbarbered hair in the work of the fifteenth-century master who had dominated artistic taste and fashion in the mid-nineteenth century, and was, once more, regaining his hold on the popular mind, thanks in some measure to Frome's own discovery and to the work which had resulted from it. He looked again at the seven plates and verified in them those legitimate borrowings which ratify a discipleship in art. The hat of Snow

White's stepmother had been lifted from a head in the Uffizi *Adoration of the Magi* though Faithful John owed something to Schongauer or Diirer it was to the Florentine *Spring* that the English painter returned, again and again, and from the naked beauty of Simonetta Vespucci had taken the flow and aliveness of unbound hair, even as he had learnt to draw folds and creases of drapery and the hang of a cloak from a young man's shoulder in the same clear-eyed, spring-intoxicated school.

The afternoon lightened as wind-blown clouds, eased of their weight of rain, were driven thinly before the face of the westering sun. Frome turned from the black-and-white drawings in their grey wooden frame and saw the intensification of orange and scarlet made by the increase of light on the curtains and paintwork of the rest of the room. It was right, of course, to use these reds and yellows with the cream colour-wash on the walls in a room that had so few hours of direct sunshine, but his ten-minutes study of black-and-white in the little recess had accustomed his eye to cooler tones and he was irritated by the change to the deliberate cheerfulness of the rest of the schoolroom. That part of himself which he had recaptured here was now moved into an unformulated protest against those modern,

hygienic, educational, sensible, commonplace influences which had driven Grimm and Walter Crane into an obscure corner of a nursery clearly devoted to the fostering of a robuster outlook.

Some child, he thought, had been laughed at, suppressed, scolded for day-dreaming in that room. Before he could recover his decision to think no more about the vanished photograph, he had identified the sitter with the child who had saved the fallen leaves of her *Household Tales* until she was old enough to assert her kinship with the imprisoned, legendary children ; with Rosamund asleep for a hundred years ; with Rapunzel so dreamingly awake in her tower ; with the Goose Girl whose only witness to her royal blood was the talking horse they had beheaded ; with Snow White in her glass coffin on the mountain-top, all of them mute, lovely and oppressed ; all of them pale and wide-eyed with faces, tilted on long necks, pulled sideways by the weight of gold-heavy hair.

Closing the door of the schoolroom behind him he went down the passage, along which the girl whom he could not thrust out of his attention had run so many times that he hastened his own steps, almost expecting to see her when he reached the corner. Before he could get there a gust of wind shook the house and a door on his left slipped its latch and swung open.

The bedroom, which Gawkrodger had apparently left much as he found it, had a carpet and curtains of the same rusty orange as the nursery. A tooled red-leather blotter was accompanied by an inkstand and pen-tray in tomato-coloured glass. There was a triple mirror on the dressing-table, its frame of moulded fruits and flowers in their natural colours set on a gilded background. The bedside reading lamp had a shade of orange silk. A colour print of nasturtiums in a yellow bowl hung on the wall opposite the door : a girl's room, but not the room of the girl he was looking for.

No gust of wind, no outside aid, opened the door that had admitted him, of his own volition, to the room in which he now stood. The window curtains had not been drawn back that day and hung, water green, translucent, letting in the sunlight that dimmed and brightened from minute to minute with the passage of unseen clouds. The sense of being under water was heightened each time the folds of the curtain, stirred by the gale that penetrated through the unbolted sashes of the window, sent wavering shadows across floor and wall. A little French clock under a glass shade ticked faintly, giving a sense of life to the closed room. Along the whole length of one wall a shelf had been fixed,

three feet above the floor ; from it a curtain of the same pale silk as those at the window hung down, forming a sort of dado. There was a Lalique vase of opalescent glass, with tiny moulded parakeets clinging round its rim, on the shelf, and a box of beaten silver inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Near to the window, within reach of an easy-chair, Frome saw two odd-looking pieces of coarse white glass, moulded into veiled heads, each backed with a nimbus. These had clearly been used as book-ends ; but only one book now remained slanting between the flat backs of the nun-like heads.

Seating himself on an arm of the chair he took the book from its place. It was a small anthology of verse, inscribed on the flyleaf, *Susan, a parting present from Jackie, at the end of the summer term*. The date was two years old.

He turned the pages quickly, noting familiar poems and their arrangement under various headings. One of the poems was marked with a faint pencil line. It began :

*Twice or thrice had I loved thee
Before I knew thy face or name ;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame
Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be.
Still when, to where thou wert, I came
Some lovely, glorious Nothing did I see. . . .*

The poem was called *Aire and Angells* and it was signed John Donne.

Half an hour later Anthony Frome was engaged in turning out the chest in the hall which contained, in addition to a strong smell of camphor, a dozen lavender-bags of violet muslin and a few rugs and garden cushions. Encouraged by the knowledge that Gawkrodger would not return for hours, he had searched every drawer, cupboard and box in the three living-rooms in vain.

Isaac, who had quitted the landing window-sill when the sun left it, was now fast asleep in the depths of his chosen arm-chair. He did not even twitch an ear in reply to several conciliatory remarks addressed to him by the besotted man who appeared to hope that a cat was going to help a human in discovering the whereabouts of a photograph he should be able to scent out for himself.

CHAPTER V

I

" I AM glad," said Susan, " that we are here in autumn. Everybody I know comes to Switzerland in May or June for the Alpine flowers, or in summer for climbing, or in winter for sports. Nobody comes for the vintage."

" This is the good time for Geneva/" agreed Marcel, " for the Genevese. Everybody is coming back from the mountains. The shops are open all once more. The concerts begin again. And the weather is still and not too hot so that one may promenade oneself as we do now."

" I don't call this promenading myself. I call it mountain-climbing."

" I may wrong translate the idiotism *se promener*" said Marcel, " but this is the Petit Saleve, and to walk on it is not to climb any mountain at all. To walk up from Etembieres is only a promenade."

" Yes, Marcel; but a promenade in English is a place to walk about on quite slowly, and to promenade is to show off."

" Show off. That is *Reldche* when there is no performance at the theatre."

" That * show off' is slang—or almost slang."

" Slang is *argot*. It is well to learn some."

" All right," said Susan, " I'll think of all the slang I know. It will brighten our spirits."

" For today," said Marcel, " the English lesson is finished. Now I will tell you about my career."

" In English ? "

" But naturally. Since it is part of my career to perfection myself in this language."

" I think you'd be able to tell me more in less time if you spoke French," said Susan.

Marcel considered this aspect of conversation for some moments.

" I am decided," he declared at last, " to speak to you in English. Even with slowness I can tell you much in one hour. And to speak *with* an English is already to profiteer."

" Even if your English does not correct you ? "

" It is the correcting which make the delay."

" Like the Hare and the Tortoise," said Susan.

" How is that ? I do not comprehend. There is a fable of Aesop."

" More haste, less speed."

" This is not the same thing at all," protested Marcel, who had the lucidity of mind which goes with an eye well open to its owner's advantage. " You are not a *tortue* and, if one day I shall try to attrap you in a course, it is not I who will sleep."

Susan felt that the conversation was taking a turn from which she had more than once deflected it ever since the little dance Emilienne had given last Monday.

" Tell me about your career, Marcel," she said.

Marcel's career was a subject on which any member of the Lombart family was apt to discourse with or without encouragement. It had been almost the only, certainly the chief, topic of conversation at the *diner de famille* held in Madame Lombart's richly furnished *hotel* on the evening before Emilienne's dance. Marcel's friend, Pierre Chapuisat, had spoken of it each time he had danced with Susan on Monday. In Chapuisat's opinion Marcel ought to stay on at the University and take his *baccalaureat*, whereas Marcel himself favoured the suggestion of an uncle that he should begin the New Year by starting on a tour of the various branches of the international banking house whose name he bore. Susan therefore was well enough informed on this subject to be able to follow Marcel's

own exposition of it with very little effort.

They were sitting in a vineyard on the slope of the Little Saleve looking out across the plain of Savoy and the valley of the Arve to the mass of Mont Blanc and the distant snows, cloud-like against the afternoon sky. Susan had been a little disappointed to find the vines rather like gooseberry bushes. She had imagined them as larger and richer than hops, and far more romantic, with broad leaves and curling tendrils surrounding heavy bunches of purple fruit. But the little, clouded, green berries she plucked from the bunches the vinemaster had cut for them were sweet and sun-warmed and very pleasant to eat after the long, hot walk up the mountain paths, some of them no better than goat-tracks, which Marcel had taken, saying they were short cuts known to him from boyhood, and that they would thus avoid the dust and glare of the new road into Savoy that was to be yet another triumph of mountain engineering when it was finished.

The view, of course, was magnificent: it was famous. All those hills and crags and gorges and then the huge sculptured profile of Mont Blanc itself in which Marcel had tried to point out the features of Napoleon and of Mr. Gladstone, seen in this Alpine monster by other generations.

" I think/' she had said, " if there is a face there at all, it is more like Mussolini than Napoleon."

Marcel had been so much annoyed by this tactlessness that Susan had not gone on to say she preferred the long blue line of the Jura where, as yet, no snow had fallen ; the mountain wall curving behind the crescent of the lake ; the view to the north on which they had turned their backs. Though she had not yet known him for quite one week, she had realised that Marcel's admiration travelled in the opposite direction to her own.

She went on sucking grapes ; watching the slow change of colour on Mont Blanc as its whiteness turned first yellow and then a rosy gold ; listening to Marcel as he explained what he meant to do with his life and how he meant to use the opportunities it had to offer, and, little by little, losing the thread of his discourse as her own thoughts came and went across her attention.

It was odd that Marcel should want to talk to her of how he was going to make himself much richer than his father had been—though his father had been quite a rich man—when Rita could have taken so much more intelligent an interest in this ambition. It was queer, and slightly depressing too, to be sitting

high in this clear, sparkling air eating grapes and looking at Mont Blanc with someone who did not like the same things, or want the same things, as she did. She liked Marcel : she had been quite amused by his suggestion that she should, every day for a short time, correct all the mistakes he made in his determined effort to speak English, a feat which at present had not got beyond the method of direct and occasionally incomprehensible translation. His small, neat features, his dark hair and long-lashed grey eyes ; the compact and vigorous physique which helped to make him a good dancer and tennis-player ; the determined way in which he drove his sports car and kissed the hands of his mother and of Mrs. Adderley on greeting or taking leave of them, were points she and Rita had already discussed with approbation. But Rita found him amusing : she had already started several jokes with him and had lost a Philippine to him after the *diner de famille* at which she had been his partner, whereas Susan had to begin from the beginning each time she met him, as though he were a complete stranger. She wished she had Rita's gift for making a background for any acquaintance as soon as it was started, so that she could refer to it and add to these references. She wished she could be really and truly interested in what Marcel was telling her.

" Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel"—that was what Rita did in a way, with very small hoops, of course, and not to anything so permanent as her soul: but it did make her very easy to get on with. Susan had never grappled anyone to her with any kind of hoop: she knew nobody with whom she could begin a conversation where they had left it off last time they met. It was something lacking in her. It made her dull and uninteresting. She had never wanted very much to see any new acquaintance a second time. No—that was not true. She had wanted, quite badly, to see Simon Winter again ; wanted it so much that she had succeeded in doing so. And it was not only because she had to give him back his book that she had plotted and kept silence and had acted, if not actually spoken, some quite definite lies in order to do so. She had had one excuse and more than one reason. Her excuse was the book: her reasons were that, first of all, she wanted if possible to find out where she could get photographs of some of the pictures about which A. X. Frome's books were written ; secondly, to discover the names hidden behind his initials ; thirdly, and very faintly, to learn more about him than just his names. But also—and this became clear to her as Marcel's voice, discoursing of matters to which she was now not paying any attention, hurried also on—

although she had every reason for disliking and distrusting Simon Winter, she could not help feeling, as Rita did, that he was an amusing person and she hoped, in seeing him again, to get some clue to the queer things he had said about her when she had met him for the first time on board the Channel boat.

For a week past she had known what he meant. He had not told her in so many words, though he *had* called her foam-born and had told her to go back to Olympus. The complete answer to her questions had come in the parcel from the bookseller's. She had found it in one of the books which, now that Rita and her mother believed she had bought them for herself, she had been able to read openly, though still with occasional twinges of apprehension lest some casual enquiry or comment should drive Morcomb into denying that she had ordered them in person. Susan knew well how emphatic Morcomb could be in clearing up the smallest, least important, misunderstanding if she chose to consider that her own probity was in question. That danger, however, grew less every day.

The weather was glorious. There were endless things to do and to see ; enchanting places to visit: little lake-side towns; Nyon with its sugar-loaf turreted castle ; Annecy where the water was still not too cold for swimming;

Coppet with its stately villa, haunted by the robust ghost of Madame de Stael ; the *bout du lac*, beyond Lausanne, where the still water reflected every detail of road and forest on the mountain-sides which held its mirror at their feet; St. Cergue, high in the Jura, with its incomparable view over the lake to France; Abondance with its painted cloisters and monastic inn where, even now, her mother and Rita and Edmond Claparede and Emilienne were drinking *Pendant Rouge*, or leaning over the wooden parapet of the bridge, dropping pebbles into the waters of the Dranse while the old woman from Chez les Meuniers told their fortunes from the way those pebbles fell.

Pierre Chapuisat had told Susan about Abondance yesterday, when they were planning to go there, and yet, here she was, sitting in a vineyard on the Little Saleve, so bored that she was not even listening to Marcel. Susan did not know exactly how this had come to pass. Something had gone a little wrong with the vehicle known as *la voiture de Marcel*, that morning, and Rita's Alvis was the only available car when the time came for starting on the fifty-mile drive. The others had gone off leaving her to follow with Marcel when, and if, his car was ready. And the car had not been ready and they had come to the Saleve instead of going to

Abondance and were now resting after the climb past objects visible from the mountain-side about which Marcel had given her a good deal of information she had already forgotten. She had really wanted to go to Abondance, partly because all she had heard of it sounded attractive, partly because of the long drive there and back. She could be silent in a car, with other people. She need not listen to what they were saying. If she had been driving to Abondance, even if she had reached that lovely place, she would have been free to think of her discovery ; to brood over the face of the girl that looked out of the plates in the large flat book Simon Winter had sent her, the face so like the one she could see in her own mirror every day of her life.

It seemed to her that Simon Winter was the only person in the world to whom she could listen; to whom she could talk, and he was, of all the people in the world, the one person she must avoid. She pretended to herself that she only wanted to talk to him because he could answer all sorts of questions about the history and art of the period dealt with in the two books he had sent her ; she knew that her real desire for his company was that he was her only human link with the author of one of them.

" So," said Marcel, in the tone of one reach-

ing the conclusion of a flawless argument, "you will see that it is impossible to marry myself until two and a half years."

"Oh, yes \ " said Susan, enthusiastically making up for her lack of attention.

"In that time you will have your majority."

"Yes," said Susan. "I shall be twenty-one a year next June. But it won't make any difference, because of course Rita and my mother will go on living at Maze House just the same."

"They will pay you a rent for this," said Marcel with decision. This did not seem to Susan to be a question she need discuss with anyone, because, of course, it could never arise. She rose to her feet and shook from her skirt the stalks of the grapes she had eaten.

"How long will it take to get down to Veyrier ? " she asked. "We mustn't miss the five o'clock tram."

2

One morning in the first week of December Susan went down to the Flower Market in the Place du Molard to buy carnations and mimosa for the bouquets she and Rita would offer to Madame Lombart that evening. It was the lady's birthday, and the Lombart tradition required that each unmarried guest at the dinner party to be given that evening at the Hotel

Lombart should arrive bringing flowers to the hostess. The older guests sent their tributes direct from a florist earlier in the day.

In the little market-place she met Pierre Chapuisat engaged on a like quest, and he asked her to come with him to Finaz, the confectioner's, to eat whipped cream with a stiff puree of chestnuts and sugar, as was the agreeable habit of the Genevese young at eleven o'clock on a winter's day. The little round tables in the famous confectioner's shop were nearly all occupied, but they found a place in a corner by one of the counters. Susan noticed that the trays, usually filled with chocolates and fondants and marrons glaces, held a curious assortment of what looked like doll's vegetables—carrots, onions, potatoes, peas—in highly coloured marzipan, with here and there a very green small cabbage. On the glass shelves behind the counter were ranged numbers of cauldrons of various sizes, made, some of chocolate, some of brown glistening nougat rough with nuts, some of gilded pasteboard.

"They are for the Escalade," said Pierre Chapuisat in answer to her question. "It is next week."

"I thought it was in sixteen-something," said Susan, who had already seen the fountain commemorating the last attempt of a Duke of

Savoy to scale the walls of the city of Geneva in a surprise attack at midnight.

"It is like your Fifth of November/" explained Chapuisat, whose mother was an Englishwoman, "only we have a carnival instead of burning a Guy Fawkes."

"Yes, but all those dear little vegetables ?"

"They commemorate the soup made by the Mere Royaume, who was cooking in her house on the city wall and heard the ladders being put there by the Savoyard invaders. So she emptied her marmite on their heads, vegetables and all, and the Savoyards were scalded and cried out, and, so, the alarm was given."

"Shall we have sugar carrots and potatoes at the Claparedes' Escalade Dance ? I thought it was just an ordinary fancy-dress ball."

"There'll be a great marmite filled with whipped cream with 'all those dear little vegetables' in it in the middle of the buffet, and Emilienne will surely have another at dinner first, and everyone will send chocolate marmites to Tolo."

"Do we eat the marmites as well as the cream and vegetables ?"

"I myself prefer not to eat the vegetables. Marzipan is too satisfying. The nougat marmites are the best, as 'food.'"

"Nougat and cream can't be as good as this,"

said Susan, a spoonful of the feathery chestnut compound half-way to her lips.

" You should eat chestnuts and cream at Springli in Zurich," said Chapuisat; " they have a specialite of it."

" Better than this ? "

" The Ziirichois say so, just as they say in Berne that Lindt chocolate is better than any other."

" So it is," agreed Susan. " The Swiss confectioners are the best in the world."

" Don't say that to those American girls Emilienne is so fond of."

Susan laughed.

" They ought to be content with being the most beautiful dancers at any party in Geneva and not turn up their noses at *petits gateaux*."

" If they ate *puits d'amour* and *mochas* every day they might not dance so lightly."

" It would be worth it," said Susan. " I'd rather dance heavily than not eat *puits* (*Tumour* and *bateaux verts*."

" Wait till you get to St. Moritz. The best sweet cakes in the whole of Switzerland are made by Hanselmann in the Engadine."

" I'm afraid we aren't going to St. Moritz," said Susan—" at least not until February, for the Grand National, and then we'll stay on to March perhaps, for the Julien Leap. Claparede is com-

peting in that. Marcel wants us to be at Caux after Christmas so that he can come over while we are there."

" Young egoist! "

" But Caux is very good. And I have to learn to ski. Rita, too, says she needs practice. She doesn't want to go to St. Moritz till she is quite sure of herself."

" I too," said Chapuisat, " am glad that you may be at Caux for some weeks. As you say, it is quite good."

" Shall you go to Caux ? "

" If possible," said Chapuisat.

Susan remembered that this, the most attractive of Marcel's friends, was also the poorest of them and might not be able to afford a winter holiday in the Engadine.

" What are you going as to the Escalade Ball ? " she asked.

" I'm not sure. As Calvin perhaps."

" Wouldn't it cast a gloom ? "

" Not in these days," said Chapuisat with a rather sour smile. " I might persuade young Marcel to go as Servetus. Calvin had him burnt alive, you know."

" Yes," said Susan, " up at Champel. I suppose there was another side to his character."

" As a theological student, I am bound to

admit there was, but I am surprised that you should know of this/'

" Oh/' said Susan, " I've discovered that quite bad characters—I mean people who have been really unkind, and even wicked in some ways—can do kind things. It makes life very difficult sometimes."

He did not ask her to explain more fully. He could see that she might be persuaded to confide some personal trouble in him, and there was a danger that if he allowed her to do this he would no longer be able to keep a tight hand on his own feelings. Pierre Chapuisat was already more than half in love with Susan. He felt that a theological student who had hardly any money and no very brilliant future before him had no business to ask so young a girl to wait for him. The fact that she had plenty of money of her own only added to his diffidence ; though he knew she liked him, he was quite sure that she did not suspect or begin to share his state. She did not appear to be in any serious trouble, only a little perplexed. He did not want to spoil the friendliness of his acquaintance with her by letting her take the relationship a step further. He could not risk becoming her adviser or the sharer of some, certainly quite innocent, secret.

" Tell me," he said, using the same device as she had herself employed a few minutes earlier

in order to change the subject, " what you are going to wear for the Carnival."

To his surprise Susan began to blush.

" Well," she said, after a moment's hesitation, " as I'm so tall and thin and have yellow hair, it's rather difficult. Emilienne wants me to dress up as a boy and put my hair under a cap : but I think I should look top-heavy."

" Lots of girls do," said Chapuisat, hoping Susan would not. " It's one of the things allowed for the Escalade. My sister used to borrow my clothes when she was younger, before she got married."

" I don't think I want to wear any of Basil's suits," said Susan. " I've got an idea of my own—out of a picture called *Spring*—a famous Italian picture."

" The *Primavera* ? "

" Yes. One of the Three Graces. The one with long hair and no curls. I've got an old brooch I bought in Lausanne, when we were there, because it was just like the one in the picture—a round one made of gold leaves with large coloured beads in each leaf, and I found a pair of large pearl ear-rings—imitation ones—and I can fix one of them right in the middle of my forehead. I'll have to wear sandals—that's easy of course, and so is the white muslin dress, only Morcomb, that's our maid, says the muslin

is too thin and won't drape well."

Chapuisat, who had no very definite memory of the details of the picture he knew only from reproductions, was relieved by the eager chatter. She was still a child, heart-whole, untroubled by any real personal difficulty, engrossed in, excited over, the prospect of dressing-up. He felt completely mature and controlled as he listened.

"What gave you the idea?" he asked. "Are the two Americans coming with you as the second and third Graces?"

To his surprise Susan blushed again: this time more violently than before.

"Oh no," she said, "there'll only be me. Nobody knows what I've chosen, except Morcomb because she's got to make the dress—and now you."

"And I'm to keep your secret?"

"Yes," she said. "Shall we dance together? Calvin and a Grecian nymph."

"I'm sorry. That was only a bad joke. No Genevese would go to a masquerade as Calvin."

"Oh," said Susan, and then, as if she had not heard or understood him, "Rita's going as a gypsy fortune-teller with a pack of Tarot cards. She'll be a great success. She always is. She can tell the most frightening fortunes. You weren't at Basil's flat last Sunday or she'd have told yours."

She was talking quickly, rather breathlessly, trying to hide something from herself. Chapuisat felt less sure that she had no secret more weighty than this about her costume, which was not a secret at all—or, was it, in some way to which he had no clue, the disguise in which she was cloaking the trouble he had not allowed her to confess to him ?

When Susan returned to the route de Malagnou she found one of Mrs. Ripley's postcards :

THE LODGE

Sunday

DR. Miss SUSAN,

Isaac continues well but me and Ripley have not seen him at hall since the weather broke. Ripley says he spends the day sleeping in your bedroom so Mr. Gorkrodder says and mews at the door.

Hoping this finds you and Madam and Miss Rita well and I am now run out of p.c.'s.

Yours respfly.

M. RIPLEY

CHAPTER VI

THE shortest day of the year was so mild and sunny that, by eleven o'clock, Frome sat at work with all the windows of the drawing-room open and was, therefore, unable to pretend he did not see the Vicar approaching the house by way of the terrace.

The Vicar, being incapable of pretence, saved Gawkrodger the trouble of answering the door-bell by stepping in at the window. He was carrying a roll of paper.

" Hope I'm not disturbing you, Frome," he said, " but my wife has sent me over to say how pleased we should be if you would come and eat turkey and plum pudding with us on Christmas Day."

Frome resigned himself to half an hour's interruption and the probable loss of the good working mood in which he had started the morning; offered his visitor a cigarette and settled down to listen, without much enthusiasm, to the Vicar's indictment of one of the clues to yesterday's *Times* crossword, as being not only unfair, but incorrect also :

" *Pas de quatre* is three words—whereas it was given as one—and each of those words is French. Even if a dance is known by that name in English it is not an English name, any more than *Washington Post* is French. My wife was very amusing about it, telling us how they tried to say *Washington Post*: * *Vashanton Posst*'—when she was at school abroad, as a girl: *Vashantonposst*—all in one word. I believe the dance has quite gone out of fashion nowadays. Times change."

Frome agreed that times changed. He had never danced the *Washington Post* himself.

" That reminds me," said the Vicar, " have you seen this week's *Prattler* ? "

" No. What is it ? "

" Oh, my dear Frome! You intellectuals! So innocent and unworldly! My wife thought you would not take it. As a matter of fact we do not ourselves subscribe to any weekly paper, but my daughters bought this one to beguile the tedium of the train journey from London yesterday, and they were naturally very much interested in what we all feel to be a photograph of local interest."

The Vicar laid the roll he had brought with him on a table and, smoothing it out, displayed a page of photographs under the heading, *Festivities in Geneva*.

" There! " he said. " Our little Susan. The observed of all observers. Quite a pretty picture."

Frome bent over the table and read the caption indicated by the Vicar's eager finger :

Miss Susan Adderley as one of the Three Graces in the well-known Italian masterpiece *Primavera* at a Fancy Dress Ball given on the occasion of the Escalade last week.

The girl had either not known that she was being photographed, or had been startled by the white flash of the magnesium light as she came down a staircase, and had been caught with one foot behind the other on the steps, turning away with a swift movement which sent the light fabric of her dress swishing round her as though she were actually dancing. But though her arms were not raised and her pose was not that of any of the Graces, the detail of her costume was plain enough, and the camera had caught a high-light on the pearl set in her hair above her forehead. There was no mistaking the origin of the figure she had chosen for a model. And she had chosen well. The face of Venus as it had looked out at him from the vanished photograph was no more closely allied to the painting it resembled than this full-

length dancer was to that other embodiment of the same idealised memory.

" My wife" — Mr. Abercrombie's voice broke in on Frome's absorbed contemplation of this likeness—" my wife was quite sure you would be able to tell us from which picture Susan had got the inspiration for this very charming disguise."

Disguise ! That was the word. No girl living in England in the present day could possibly be so like a painter's idealisation of a Florentine woman of the fifteenth century as by some trick of lighting, and in what was clearly a photograph taken in haste and necessarily deformed to some extent in reproduction, this girl appeared to be.

" I imagine," he said at length, "that Miss Adderley intended to impersonate one of the Graces in Botticelli's *Primavera* ; but in a snapshot of this kind the likeness is, of course, rather difficult to establish."

"It is quite a good likeness of Susan, I assure you. I wonder if you happen to possess a reproduction of the actual picture among all these interesting portfolios."

For a moment Frome was inclined to say he had nothing he could show the Vicar. He wanted to get rid of the man, to be alone with the evidence of the thing he could not yet believe. Then

he remembered that this copy of the illustrated weekly was not his own and felt even less inclined to ask if he might borrow it. Perhaps if he took Mr. Abercrombie into the next room and showed him what he asked for, the Vicar might be shepherded out into the garden and down the drive and set on his homeward way before he noticed that he had left the *Prattler* behind him.

" I think I can find something of the sort," he said. " Will you come into the study ? "

But Mr. Abercrombie, though very much interested in the plates, including one of a detail which showed the actual figure from which Susan's dress was copied, not only remembered to collect his *Prattler*, but, being a far more accomplished borrower than his host, went home carrying Frome's copy of Venturi to show to his family.

For the rest of the morning Frome was unable to settle down to his interrupted work. He had, during the past six weeks, made what he believed to be a completely successful effort to escape from the fantastic enslavement to the idea that the house was haunted by the living girl who had gone away from it only a few hours before he came to meet her ghostly welcome.

The storm had driven him to explore the upper floor and to find such evidence of her mind and disposition as had for an hour or two sent

him back to the delusions of his own young manhood, and, once more, he had dreamed the dream from which life had awakened him. The day after that discovery the wind had died away into a stillness of clear weather. Frome was able to get a couple of hours good walking every afternoon between long, quiet mornings revising and collating what he had written, and long, lamp-lit evenings writing what he would correct next day. He had almost finished the section on Magical Jewels which led into the one on Rings; he proposed to begin work on this in the New Year. He was deep in his theme—it had closed round his mind, shutting him off from all other preoccupations, giving him the steady and concentrated happiness of the good workman who, having assembled all his tools, is free to handle material of the right quality and who sees, day by day, the thing he had planned taking on form and substance and, as it grows, revealing to its artificer potentialities and expansions greater than those of the original scheme. He had reached the stage when it seemed to him that his completed work would be better than he had planned to make it. The only flaw in his content was an occasional doubt whether the year he had allowed himself were long enough to see the book through.

The Vicar's call had scattered his marshalled

thoughts. The pages of his careful notebooks no longer gave him the logical, the convincing, order of his argument. They showed him only the facts he had set down in the starkness of date and verification, unlit by significance of juxtaposition and deduction which had been so clear to him an hour ago. Alone once more with his papers spread before him, two black lines abruptly written across the top of a fresh page of foolscap, he was as unable to continue the paragraph as an inexperienced speaker, interrupted on a public platform, is unable to finish his sentence and ignominiously stammers and sits down.

He did not attempt to hide from himself the true nature of this disturbance. Ever since, in the green watery light of the little room upstairs, he had opened the book of poems and seen the faint pencil-mark waver down the margin of the page, he had known that, sooner or later, he would have to face a certainty which, just because it was so certain, he had been able to thrust aside. Sooner or later he would have to follow the clue she had left for him to find :

*. . . what thou wert and who
I bid love ask, and now
That it assume thy body I allow . . .*

He had been able to stop there. At the time it had been enough to accept this assurance that

the intangible was not the non-existent; that his recognition of a wraith that still lingered in the place of which he was now the temporary master was not a baseless fancy, but the reconstruction from a score of significant details of a mind akin to his own.

So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame . . .

How did it go—that odd disturbing poem which began with so sudden an attack ?

Frome threw down the pen on which the blue-black ink had dried into crusts in the winter sunshine and, pushing back his chair, turned to look at the table where, ten minutes ago, the Vicar's finger had pointed to a glossy page. He knew that Mr. Abercrombie had taken the magazine away with him, placing his own copy of Venturi's *Botticelli* inside it to protect the book's white vellum binding, but the irrational hope that the picture he wanted to see again might after all be there was swifter than reason : in the moment of its birth and frustration it became an equally irrational anger.

" Damn the fellow! " he said, getting up and feeling in his coat pocket for his pipe. " He's got the lot."

The moment he had put off for six weeks and more had come upon him just as he had proved his wisdom in deferring it. Now, because the

Vicar had seen him and had come in through the open window, he would not be able to go on with his real, his now quite urgent, task, until he had collected every shred of evidence and had examined the sum of it as carefully as he would examine any other problematic work of an anonymous or an unauthenticated artist.

He was feeling slightly exalted and high-minded over this resolution to cleanse his bosom of so much perilous stuff when the bubble of his mood was pricked by the knowledge that, in order to accomplish his purpose, he would have to ask Gawkrodger where he had hidden the photograph which had been the first cause of this disturbance of his solitude.

And Gawkrodger would in all probability have forgotten what he had done with one of many small objects he had cleared away over three months ago, and would certainly wonder why he had not been asked to unearth this particular one at the time.

Frome had put himself at a complete disadvantage from the outset. He had behaved like an ostrich, burying his head in the sand; pretending that the disappearance of that disturbing photograph was a matter of so little importance that it was not worth the question to his servant which would have restored it to him at once. He had been guilty of the

same dishonesty when he had allowed Mr. Abercrombie to carry off the illustrated text and the magazine of fashionable intelligence just now.

" You might look me out a train to Avonhampton, Gawkrodger, and ring up for the station taxi," he said. "I want to go there this afternoon, unless it's early closing day. I need a hair-cut."

" They close some shops Thursdays and others Saturdays—'ardly sensible to my mind," said Gawkrodger.

" It is Wednesday today, so that will be all right," said Frome, and then with a conscious effort: " Mr. Abercrombie came in by the window while I was at work this morning. It was open and, seeing me, it was quite natural for him to do so. But I rather think I'll try working upstairs, in that room at the end of the passage, for a bit. There is bound to be more rough weather in January and I shall be out of the wind's way up there. There's a good big table which will hold all the books and papers I shall need for the next week or two."

Frome was not giving Gawkrodger reasons for an order the man was unlikely to question ; he was making excuses to himself for an impulse which had overridden his decision to ask the man outright what had become of the photo-

graph he had twice removed, once from the study and, the second time, from the hiding-place he had found for it in the drawing-room bureau.

" Have it your own way," said Gawkrodger. " There's a fine large coil-skep i' outhouse. I'll no want to be lugging coil upstairs more nor once a day."

It was not until he was in the train on his way back from Avonhampton that Frome opened the *Prattler* he had bought at the station book-stall. It was a copy of the current issue, dated two days ahead of its actual publication. It contained no reference to any festivities in Geneva. Frome had not looked at the date on the paper Mr. Abercrombie had shown him.

The little train rocked on its single-track line to the junction and stopped to hiss in the darkness of innumerable wayside platforms, which all seemed, so far as he was able to distinguish anything by the light of flickering oil-lamps, to be situated among tree-tops and inhabited by troops of milk-cans. After half an hour of this journey, alone in a compartment, Frome's anger at his own futility gave way to boredom and, for lack of other employment, he reached for the paper he had flung into the far corner of the carriage on discovering his mistake. He seldom looked

at this kind of periodical, finding its illustrations revolting and its letterpress sub-human, and he started from the beginning of this one, reading from the advertisements of liqueurs; winter-sports outfits and remedies for obesity, straight through to the snap-shots of hunt balls; of brides and bridegrooms; of film stars taking nourishment in their Californian palaces, with a dazed feeling of having read every caption and seen every illustration many times before.

The heading, *News of the Moment*, promised something better; but it turned out to be a collection of short paragraphs chronicling the comings and goings of people of no importance, strung together by the chirpings of a writer whose signature, "Tomlette," in holograph, sprawled across the bottom of the column. Either because there was a scarcity of news of the moment this week, or because the last item on Tomlette's list appeared to the being behind the pseudonym to have unusual value, the final paragraph was leaded to fill twice the space allotted to the rest.

Frome, who had skipped the others, found his eye caught by this one :

Clever Joyce Wentworth, who, of course, is the part author of some of the lyrics in that box-office hit, *Girls will be Girls*, tells me that

she is killing two birds with one stone for her winter holiday this year. She is getting herself taught to ski at a certain fashionable resort the name of which wild horses couldn't drag from me, and, at the same time, collecting specimens of peasant art in the high mountains ; she has a sure flair for the quaint and out-of-the-way in art—and which we shall all be tumbling over ourselves to buy when Joyce is back once more in her studio-shop overlooking the Mappin Terraces.

Once more Frome flung the paper from him. This time it hit the seat and slithered away from it to fall open at the very page on which the name of the woman he meant never again to see or to speak of, or even to remember, had confronted him, the answer to, and the warning against, his deliberate attempt to draw nearer to a girl he had never seen.

CHAPTER VII

I

SUSAN knew that she ought not to have worn them. She was quite tall enough in her socks, too tall in fact. These pin-heeled, gilt shoes made her stand almost on tip-toe. They tired her feet. They were only good to dance in for the first half-hour. The little paste buckles that fastened the straps above her ankles caught the hem of her frock. She had bought the shoes in the rue du Rhone because they were the nearest things to sandals she could find. They *were* sandals : their soft pink satin lining was smooth against her bare feet when she first put them on on the night of the Escalade. She had been able to stand in front of the long mirror in the bedroom and take the pose of the figure whose dress she had copied to wear at the Escalade Ball, one arm raised high above her shoulder, the other clasping Morcomb's disapproving shoulder.

" I can't but feel you should be wearing a

longer slip, Miss Susan," the maid had said, making an eleventh hour attempt in the cause of warmth and decency.

Rita had scouted the suggestion.

" In point of fact, Morky," she said, turning from the dressing-table where she was adding another touch of mascara to her brilliant, gypsy make-up, " she oughtn't to be wearing any slip at all—and she ought to be barefoot."

" In which case, Miss Rita, she might as well go to this Fancy Dress Ball as naked as Venus."

" If you'll take a good look at the next picture in that book, Morky, you'll see that is *exactly* what she should have done. The likeness is positively uncanny. Pierre Chapuisat pointed it out to me yesterday."

" She'd not get any partners if she did," Morcomb had said with a sardonic sniff.

Susan remembered this chatter now as she sat with her feet up on a long chair. She'd had all the partners she wanted at the Escalade : Marcel and Claparede, who had talked about themselves, and the young Englishman from the League of Nations who had talked about Rita, and then, when it was time to put on cloaks and masks and go out into the town to see the carnival, Pierre Chapuisat. He had taken charge of her and they had gone up out of the crowd on to the Treille and had lent over a

balustrade of the terrace and listened to the shouting and singing coming up from the Corrairie. He had shown her the very window from which the Mere Royaume had poured her boiling soup over the Savoyards on their scaling ladders, and had given her, as an Escalade present, the little silver ladder he had worn on his watch-chain when he was a schoolboy. She had taken off the high-heeled golden sandals before going out and had put on stockings and shoes and had worn her new squirrel coat, for the first time, that evening. This had given her a pleasant sense of grown-up confidence. While she leaned out, peering through the leafless branches of the trees in the Bastion Gardens below them; listening to Chapuisat telling her of the Genevese past and of his pride in it and in the whole history of the democratic confederation to which he belonged, and of his belief that it had achieved the ideal form of self-government, she had forgotten her obsession, forgotten that, under the soft, warm lightness of her silky furs, she wore the pseudo-classic draperies of a Renaissance nymph.

She had gone to the Cathedral of St. Pierre with Madame Lombart that morning, and had heard the whole congregation join in the psalm of deliverance. It was sung in a metrical form and to the same tune as she had learnt at school, when they had given a concert of Scottish Music

one winter term. She had told Pierre this. Together they had sung through a verse of it; he in the French of Calvin, she in the English of John Knox. Tonight, as she sat with her sprained ankle bound up, her foot on a cushion, watching the dancers in the ballroom of the Palace Hotel at Caux, the words seemed to fit the tune of the slow waltz to which two professionals were giving an exhibition of the newest dance from Paris :

*Even as the bird
out of the fowler's gren
Escapeth away,
right so it forth with us:
Broke are their nets,
and we have scaped thus
From bloody teeth
and their most cruel voice.
Which as a prey,
to eat us would rejoice.*

It might have been the pain in her ankle which made her set these grim lines to the sensuous melancholy air of the dance music. The arches of her feet had ached from the strain of dancing in those preposterously high-heeled sandals on the night of the Escalade, and that pain had threaded through the rest of the evening, though she had changed her shoes to go up to the terrace for half an hour. She had gone

down again into the crowd with Chapuisat's firm hand under her elbow, steering her away from the rowdier groups of students and helping her up on to steps or window-sills to watch the passage of the decorated cars bearing gesticulating allegoric figures through the streets. She ought to have known better than to try to dance in those sandals again: but last night she had worn a shell-pink dress with a skirt made of little flounces, each edged with a thread of gold, and the gold sandals were just the right finish to the whole effect. If Morcomb had been there to warn her against those six-inch, pin-point heels it might not have happened ; but Morcomb had stayed behind in Geneva with Mrs. Adderley who had a touch of the *grippe* when Susan and Rita had set off to join the Elmslies who had arranged this date when they met in Paris. Like themselves, the Elmslie girls were planning to improve their ski-ing at Caux before proceeding to the fiercer tests at St. Moritz.

Everything had gone just a little wrong: her mother's illness; the last minute change of plan which had delayed the arrival of the Elmslies so that Rita and Susan had found themselves without their party when they arrived at the Palace Hotel last Tuesday. Rita had decided not to let her mother know of this. The Elmslies would come on in a day or two. There were other

English people in the hotel, friendly enough, Rita found them, though Susan felt a little shy and was glad that Marcel and Claparede were coming for the week-end. And, half-way through the third evening, when she was beginning to enjoy the new experience of being out in the snow till twilight, and dancing for the rest of the evening, Susan had slipped and twisted her ankle. There would be no ski-ing; no skating; no lugeing; no dancing for her for at least a week, and it was all her own fault for wearing those preposterous shoes.

Rita had been annoyed with Susan, and so had Marcel when he arrived next day in his *voiture* with Edmond Claparede and a couple of most superior bob-sleighs.

Susan had begged to be allowed to stay in bed and read. She was still only half-way through the copy of *Simonetta* by A. X. Frome which had come in the parcel from the Librairie Georg on the day after their arrival in the route de Malagnou. But neither Rita nor the brisk Swiss doctor who had bound up her foot would allow her to do this.

"It's no use being a moping martyr/" said Rita—"especially on the fourth floor. It's too far up for me to keep on being sisterly. You just hobble about in the lounge where we can all look in on you."

The doctor went further : so long as Made-moiselle did not put her foot to the ground, and she was unlikely to do thte voluntarily for a day or two, it would do her good to get about on the crutches he would send up to the hotel. She would not find herself alone as a temporary cripple ; already there were other casualties. Such accidents were part of the winter sports season. She could sit out and watch the skating during the hours of sun, but she must not try to read out of doors on account of the glare.

It was not any consolation for her pain and boredom to know that it was through her own fault she had to endure this double affliction. Everybody tried to be kind, but nobody had time to do more than shout a hearty greeting as they skated past her chair; or hurried off, carrying their skis and sticks, to catch the electric train ; or stop for a minute on their way to the sledge run to ask her perfunctory questions. It was all most interrupting.

Left to herself Susan would have been quite happy with a book and her thoughts. As it was her face grew stiff with smiling and she got so tired of saying " *Quite* all right, thank you/" " No, I really don't need anything," " Yes, I shall be able to walk in a day or two," that she began to confuse the answers to the questions they fitted. This mattered very little : the ques-

tioners rarely paused for a reply. They might just as well have left her to enjoy the sunshine on the snow and the incredible blue of the sky behind the Dent du Javan, though she considered this wonder of Nature one of the most repulsive looking mountains left standing by those primeval convulsions which have made the Alps what they are. She wished she might have been taken to some ski-ing school which looked out on the long calm line of the Jura, as she had seen it with the snow on its summit, rosy with dawn and sunset, every day between Christmas and New Year when she walked off the enormous dinners and dance suppers to which they had been invited, night after night. She missed the Jura ; she missed Geneva with its cloud of tiny sea-gulls, *mouettes* they were called, circling round the bridges and snatching at the bread held out to them by children, and grown-up people too, who fed them all day long. She missed Tolo whose demand to be taken *faire manger les mouettes* it was so pleasant to satisfy on the mornings when she was not going with Emilienne to Mademoiselle Le-coultre's lectures on Italian Art. She missed the pleasant, busy life of the Genevese ladies who all, however married or elderly, attended lectures, and sometimes gave them, though these were mostly, at any rate in the Lombarts*

circle, on social and political questions in which Emilienne and her mother took very active interest.

It was so much more amusing to stay abroad with the people of the country than it had been to spend a holiday in some foreign hotel with crowds of other foreigners all engaged in amusing themselves.

And now those pleasant months were over and they were, once more, staying in a foreign hotel; in a far larger, gayer, more sumptuous and more heartless hotel than any Susan had been taken to before.

Rita enjoyed it, and was looking forward to moving on to the Suvretta Haus, just outside St. Moritz; and then to the tour of the Italian lakes, which was to fill in the weeks before they went to Venice and the Lido, to bathe there until it was time to go on to Salzburg to yet another cosmopolitan hotel for the Musical Festival. Susan had hoped it might be possible for them to spend a week in Florence; but Rita, who had been taken to this city with a party of school-fellows three years earlier, said the place was simply lousy with Art and miles off the route she and her mother had worked out. If Susan wanted to moon about in churches and picture galleries she could find plenty of these in Milan and Verona and also, Rita believed, in

Venice, where they were going to stay for some time. Rita simply could not understand why Susan had gone goofy about Old Masters since they came to Geneva ; it wasn't as if there had been stacks of these valuable, but hardly up to date, works in that town.

" I should have thought," said Rita, concluding her indictment of Susan's unreasonableness, " that Elijah and those horses would have been enough to cure you for life."

Susan had found it more comfortable not to argue this point.

Life in Geneva had been so full and so amusing that Susan had been able, for days at a stretch, to forget all about the queer meeting with Simon Winter which had twisted so strong a fibre with the thread she had fastened, like the end of a clue, between herself and the inhabitant of the house she loved so much, the house that was soon to be her own.

Mrs. Adderley had noticed her child's pre-occupation, and had wondered about its cause, without connecting it with her ex-husband's short transit across their path, or with the books the girl read and the lectures she had wished to attend. She had seen with relief that Susan had grown more normal as time went on, and hoped that the change of air and of occupation at Caux would complete the cure, if a cure were needed.

She did not know that the various interests and friendships of their three months' stay in the town during the most active season of its social life had been cables holding down the balloon of Susan's day-dream and that by cutting them she was sending her daughter back into the clouds once more.

But Susan, as she watched the dancers, was thinking of the chapter of the neglected book which she had finished that afternoon and wishing that it were Pierre Chapuisat and not Edmond Claparede whom Marcel had brought with him to Caux for the week-end. She would have let Pierre sit with her, and she could have talked to him, perhaps, about the interesting ideas in the book he had told her he had read and enjoyed when it first came out. Both Marcel and Edmond had offered to sit out with her, but she had said it would amuse her far more to watch them dance. Edmond, who had already cast a favourable eye on the elegant Miss Wentworth, quite the best skater and dancer in the hotel, had gone off in pursuit of the lady and was now dancing with her. Marcel had been more deliberate about it.

" Since I may not be with you I shall learn the new dance with Rita—and next week when your tordation shall be finished I shall teach this dance to you myself," he had announced.

" *Sprain* is the word, Marcel. I have sprained my ankle."

" While you are invalid I do not take English lessons," said Marcel, as though he were balancing an account.

Rita was quite willing to show Marcel the new steps she had learnt. He was a born dancer and brought to the exercise the concentrated seriousness that marked his approach to any activity which interested him.

Susan watched them with pleasure. He and Rita were of the same height. They were both well-proportioned. Rita's brown curls and glowing face made an attractive contrast with Marcel's neat dark head and pale regular features. He had the chiselled beauty of an antique coin, made stranger by grey eyes shadowed by long thick eyelashes. Marcel was so very handsome that, if he had been a few inches taller, he might have made a success on the films. This possibility had occurred to him : it was one of the aspects of careering he had mentioned in that monologue to which Susan had paid so little attention that autumn afternoon in the vineyard on the Little Saleve.

Susan thought of it now as the floor cleared and Rita and Marcel were left in the centre improvising a variation of their own, just as the two professionals had done earlier in the evening.

Rita had at one time talked of taking up dancing seriously, but, to her mother's relief, she had not found any dancing partner up to her own standard, and the project had lapsed. How odd it would be if she and Marcel started it again! They were doing the loveliest things now, making a pattern of the strange waltz that quickened as they danced. The leader of the small string-orchestra seemed to know what they wanted and that he could not set too quick a tempo for their flying feet. Marcel's teeth gleamed white between his parted lips as he swung Rita this way and that in a series of reverses that stirred her curly hair in the wind of their alternations. Rita laughed as she danced, and her red mouth was like a ripe pomegranate breaking to show its seeds. Her lacquered fingernails on Marcel's shoulder were as red as her lips, as red as the shoes on her feet. The patterned silk of her red-and-blue dress flew wide of, or wrapped itself round, her with each sudden turn and seemed part of the dancer's body—the wings that gave her lightness, that lifted her on tiptoe, till she seemed to be dancing above and not on the floor.

Susan felt her own cheeks burn with the excitement of watching her sister. She loved Rita with pride ; she loved Marcel because he was making Rita more beautiful by adding his

own beauty to hers. She wanted this wild, lovely music to go on and on, carrying Rita and Marcel through the labyrinth of sound till they reached its centre and spun there immortally.

But the music stopped ; the enchantment was over : the circle of watchers broke out into applause and Rita and Marcel, breathless and happy, walked across the floor to thank and be congratulated by the musicians who had inspired and accompanied them.

Two people, who had been standing behind Susan's chair, went on clapping after most of the others had flocked to the cocktail bar across the hall.

" What on earth made Godefroi play that waltz ? " said the man.

" What was it ? I don't remember ever dancing to it myself," said his companion.

" I don't suppose you ever did, Joyce. It's the waltz from Berlioz' *Symphonic Fantastique*, arranged for four strings. I wonder if the girl put him up to it ?"

" I don't suppose she did."

Joyce Wentworth laid her hand on the back of Susan's chair.

" Sir Claud Baynes wants to know if your sister is in league with Godefroi," she said.

" Oh no," said Susan. " Rita only knows *God save the King* because people stand up for it. I

should think it was Marcel who arranged that He and Godefroi were at school together."

" How very odd/" said Joyce Wentworth.

" No. It's just Swiss. All the Geneva boys go to the College de Calvin, even if they don't go on to the University. Marcel says Godefroi is a genius, but he has to have a dance band, to pay for being a composer in his spare time."

Sir Claud Baynes pulled a chair up beside Susan.

" Tell me more about this," he said. " I only arrived an hour ago."

" I don't know any more than I've told you," said Susan, " but I daresay Edmond Claparede will know as much as Marcel does. He was dancing with Miss Wentworth just now."

" He's gone to get me an ice," said Joyce Wentworth.

" Wouldn't *you* like an ice ? " Sir Claud asked Susan.

" Oh yes," said Susan. " I've only had one since dinner."

He went off in search of ices and Joyce Wentworth took his place.

" How's the ankle ? " she asked; rather sharply, Susan thought.

" Much better," said Susan, " but I'm getting very tired of the splint."

" I've got some stuff for sprains. A man I

know gets it from Germany. They used it on the last Everest expedition. I'll bring it along to your room when you go up."

Susan was so astonished at this offer from Miss Wentworth, who, so far, had not been at all inclined to make friends with her, that she accepted it without protest.

It was not until Rita and Marcel joined them that she realised she had been made a bridge across which Miss Wentworth was able to make an easy transit. When the music started again, she and Marcel danced off together, and Rita was left with Edmond Claparede and the ice he brought. They were joined by Claud Baynes, followed by a waiter carrying a tray spread with supper for two. While she shared soup and sandwiches with her new acquaintance, Susan made Edmond talk about the singular musician who compensated himself for having to earn his living in playing dance tunes by making the puppets move to excerpts from the music few of them could listen to in its full context.

" But that's one of the dances from the *Revue des Deux Mondes* we heard in Paris/" Susan protested, as Marcel and Miss Wentworth passed them.

" So ! Godefroi makes his programme to suit. But tomorrow you will all be dancing to *Also Sprach Zarathustra* of Strauss," said Claparede.

" I shall enjoy that," said Claud Baynes, looking at Rita. " Will you dance in it with me ? Shall we try out my paces now ? "

" Of course," said Rita, " she won't bring any liniment, or whatever it may be, for your ankle. To begin with it's too late and she's gone to bed by now. Your belief in her is sub-human in its trustfulness."

" What made her say she would—suddenly—after two days, now that my ankle is almost well again ? "

" Oh," said Rita, flinging her pillows across the room in preparation for lying flat to sleep, " first she wanted to stay with you until she could nobble Marcel—and she wanted you to be grateful and diffident so that, when Claud Baynes came back, she would be persuading you—so *kind*"

" But she didn't dance with Claud."

" No—she showed off *to* Claud by dancing with Marcel. She thought Claud would stay with you till she was ready for him and that I'd have to put up with Claparede. She'd found out how badly poor Edmond dances. That's why she dropped him."

" And I had to put up with Edmond, and you got Claud."

" I did," said Rita, " and I'm going to stick

to him. He's old enough to be worth while. I'm tired of all these boys."

"Doesn't he belong to Joyce Wentworth ? He's about her age."

"He's come here from London to meet his sister. The Wentworth happens to know him. She makes a habit of knowing everybody. She knew you when it suited her."

"Oh ! Miss Rita ! What a sink of iniquity !"

"Go to sleep, Susan."

Rita turned off the light on the table between the two beds and was asleep within a minute : but Susan, who had had no real exercise and very little fresh air for the past two days, lay awake for some time longer, trying to recapture the air of the Berlioz waltz to which Rita and Marcel had danced so beautifully, and wondering a little about the musician, Godefroi, in whom the new man Baynes took such an interest; about Claud Baynes ; about her mother and Tolo ; about Pierre Chapuisat, who had told her he was to preach his first students' sermon next Sunday; about Isaac, who mewed outside her bedroom door... about Maze House... about Simonetta and Giuliano and green, translucent water, hardly breaking on the shore of a painted sea. . . .

2

The Elmslies, father, mother and son and two daughters, arrived on Monday, an hour after Marcel and Claparede had gone down to Montreux on their way back to Geneva.

Susan had stayed upstairs as the doctor was coming during the morning to take off the splint. When Mrs. Elmslie hurried in to assure herself that she need not ring through to Geneva for Mrs. Adderley, she found Miss Wentworth more or less in charge of the case. The doctor had been very much interested in the specific for sprains which the young Englishwoman had produced earlier in the morning. She had not forgotten, after all, but had not known the number of the Adderley girls' room last night. She was so sensible and competent that Rita went off to her ski-ing class, leaving Susan to the care of Miss Wentworth, who said that she was not going out until after luncheon and would write her letters in the Adderleys' room and help Susan to get down to watch the skating as soon as the doctor had gone.

What with Miss Wentworth and the doctor and Mrs. Elmslie and the two Elmslie girls, Susan's morning had been so crowded that it was nearly twelve o'clock before she was able to hop across the passage to her bath. The doctor

had been pleased with the state of her injury and had massaged her foot with Miss Wentworth's ointment and bound it up without the splint, saying that she would probably be able to walk comfortably next day, but had better not try to skate or to dance for another week. Miss Wentworth had reported this verdict to Mrs. Elmslie and had gone out of the room with her. Mrs. Elmslie seemed to feel that Susan's recovery was entirely due to this very kind friend's care of her. Pam and Chips Elmslie had looked in and said, Poor sweet \—and it was simply too foul—and what awful weather—and Dan had left his skis behind at Lausanne. They had then gone off to their own room on the floor below. Susan had told Miss Wentworth that she could dress herself without any help, and get along to the lift quite well. She did not expect her to come back again. Joyce Wentworth seemed to have an unlimited capacity for making new acquaintances. In five minutes she and Mrs. Elmslie were treating one another as established friends.

" I expect," said Susan to herself as she went through the contortions in which those who attempt to have a hot bath without wetting the bandages on one ankle involve themselves, " I dare say she's being a sister to Dan Elmslie by this time. I wonder what Rita will do about it."

It was, therefore, a little surprising when she got back to the bedroom again to see the sleeve of the canary-coloured pullover and the fold of the blue trousers worn by Miss Wentworth, who, half hidden in an arm-chair by the window, was smoking a cigarette.

" I say," she said, without looking round as Susan closed the door and hopped across to the dressing-table, " I didn't know that Tony Frome's book had got into the Guillemots."

Half an hour later Susan was still sitting sideways on the chair in front of the dressing table, her bath-robe fallen open, her hair, freed from the rubber cap she had pulled off, falling over her shoulders as she leant over the back of the chair, listening to all Joyce Wentworth had to say about Anthony Frome.

It had been easy to make her talk. Susan was not hampered by the need to hide her interest in him from this stranger. It was natural enough that she should possess his book. She had been attending lectures on the Florentine painters in Geneva. Miss Wentworth accepted this information as sufficient to account for Susan's desire to hear more of the writer who had recently brought this school of painting into fashion again. It flattered her to be able to supply so much first-hand detail about him to

the very pretty girl who, together with her sister, had been the centre of speculation among the other visitors in the hotel, ever since they had arrived a week ago. Claud Baynes had noticed her at once. Miss Wentworth knew that the surest way of nipping his interest in the bud was to make herself the fountain-head of information about the Adderleys. She wished she had taken more trouble with them when they first arrived and were a little lonely among strangers for a day or two. She was making up for lost time now.

She meant to appear at luncheon helping Susan into the dining-room. If the sister and these new people who had arrived this morning were not down, Joyce would make Susan sit with her at the table for two in the large window. Then Claud Baynes would be bound to see them together and, after luncheon, when she had arranged to skate with him, it would be the most natural thing in the world to begin talking of the girl. In the midst of enthusiastic agreement with his comments on her beauty, or whatever point he admired in Susan Adderley, she knew how to drop that ill word which empisons liking. She had done it so often before in the course of a predatory life.

Claud Baynes had come to Switzerland at Joyce Wentworth's suggestion. She had been

making up a party when she met him in London for the first time, and he had been sufficiently interested to note the particulars she gave him and to turn up, as he had said he might do, early in the New Year. Joyce had not been sure he would come : now that he had, it was to be made quite clear that he belonged to *her*. He had gone up to the ski-ing slopes that morning with two of the young men to whom she had firmly introduced him last night, after the Adderley girls had gone to bed. The advent of the very Kensingtonian Mrs. Elmslie and her family, to whose party the Adderleys would now belong, fitted in perfectly.

The plan had begun to work. Joyce had gone back to Susan's room after seeing Mrs. Elmslie to the door of the lift, feeling quite sure of her ground. And then, looking for something to amuse herself with until the girl returned from the bathroom, she had come upon Tony Frome's book and had been taken back by the sight of it to the only really serious defeat in the series of battles which had marked her progress through life.

The memory of that set-back changed the quasi-benevolent mood in which she waited for the girl she had intended to help. Resentment clouded her mind and roused in her the will to injure and belittle. She had made an

effort to be kind ; had given up one lazy hour of her morning already and, though her ultimate purpose was selfish, there was some soul of goodness in its evil. It cost her no effort to yield to the wrecking impulse that swept away, not only her moderately good intention, but the stronger control she usually held on herself when her own interests were at stake.

Susan's absorption as she listened, speechless after the first releasing questions had set Miss Wentworth's tide of information flowing, had the same effect on her as the attention of an eager audience has on any orator : she invented new aspects ; ransacked her memory for forgotten details and found them, red-hot with the suppressed fury in which they had been buried ; drew her own portrait, generous, trusting, wanting only to serve the best interests of the man for whom she had done so much and worked so hard ; grieved as an artist over the play she had mined with so much devotion from the difficult rock of the book she held in her hands as she spoke. She described Frome: attractive, but self-centred; handsome in a bitter and contemptuous way; incredibly old-fashioned and pompous in his manners : a man who had never outgrown the codes and standards of the nursery, and expected his wife to conform to a code of morality that had gone out of

fashion even in his mother's day.

" But/' faltered Susan, " his book isn't a bit like that. It is a very polite book, and I think rather immoral as well."

Joyce Wentworth stared at her for a moment.

" Depraved, is what you mean," she said ; " that's what made its success. Art criticism spread thin over an erotic story. I was taken in myself at first, like everybody else. The book *was* a success. I admit that. It's the man I'm talking about."

" Well," said Susan, " you know him and I don't, but if he really is so much unlike his book, I should think you'd be thankful you were warned in time and broke off your engagement before it was too late."

Joyce Wentworth laughed. She had eased the first storm of her resentment by giving her own account of its cause. Susan's innocent acceptance of her distortion gave her a momentary pang of shame which served to rekindle her anger.

" That," she said, flinging the book away from her and rising to her feet, " that is truer than you know. I did it before it was too late. Some instinct warned me to clear out. I did not know how wise I had been till later."

" Did you fall in love with someone else ? " asked Susan.

" I had fallen out of love with someone else, and I got rid of him too. No. It was just after I had broken off with Tony that there was the scandal over the Dante drawings."

She stopped and looked with narrowed eyes at Susan, who, pale and wide-eyed, and still only half-dressed, leaned across the back of her chair, her chin on her bent wrist, without speaking.

" You see/" the malicious voice went on, " Tony had discovered them. He had written about them. He had satisfied everybody that they were genuine and of enormous value. Naturally he felt they ought to belong to him." She paused again. " They vanished," she said. " Nobody can prove anything; but everybody believes he took them, and that one day he'll sell them to one of the big collectors, if he has not done so, secretly, already. In any case the place got too hot to hold him, and so he's gone too."

Susan remembered that Simon Winter had spoken of Frome as having gone to earth. As on that former occasion, so now, she held her breath, knowing his hiding-place. Then slowly, from a great distance, there came riding into her mind the impulse to defend the fugitive whose safety she held behind her own unspoken word. Some of the emotion with which

Joyce Wentworth had charged the hour reached her and was transformed to chivalry. She clutched the back of the chair on which she sat and, throwing up her chin, she looked straight into Joyce Wentworth's angry face.

¹¹ "I don't believe one word of it," said Susan. "I know he didn't steal those drawings. I think you have made up everything about him."

"Oh—do you," said Joyce Wentworth. "Wait a moment. I'll show you."

Before Susan could speak, she had stormed out of the room.

Susan stood up, but she was trembling so violently that, with only one foot available for support, there was nothing for it but to sit down again. She was shocked, not by what the woman had said—without reflection she knew it was untrue—but by the urgent malice with which she had told her lie. Susan had never met this form of human violence before: but, though it astonished, it did not deceive her. As her agitation died away she was able to recognise the consequence of her own instinctive check to the impulse which had almost betrayed her into disclosing Mr. Frome's whereabouts. She would *have* to speak to Rita now. Rita must be warned not to tell Miss Wentworth. It would be so easy, so natural, for her to do this. Susan's own secret was now extended to be his secret too. She was

at once happy and unhappy. Because he had been attacked he had become more real to her : she was now able, by defending him, to repay him for the happiness his work had brought her. Though she did not think of herself in such terms, her fluttered spirit was like that of a bird protecting the nest where its fledglings stirred under the cover of its outspread wings.

She stood up again : this time she was steady enough to begin to dress. As she fastened the narrow belt of her tunic the door opened and Joyce Wentworth appeared carrying a large book.

" Look here/" she said, " Fm sorry I lost my temper just now, but Tony Frome's book always makes me see red, and you shouldn't have given me the lie, you know."

" No/" said Susan. " It was rude of me. I lost my temper too."

" All the same, I'll ask you to look at this. My idiot of a maid packed it instead of my address book. They are both bound in the same style."

She laid the book on the dressing-table. Its cover was of brown leather, tooled and gilded in the Florentine manner, with small inlays of red and green.

" There ! " she said, and opened the book at the fly-leaf. " Will that satisfy you ? "

Susan looked at the inscription : *To Joyce*

from Tony, in firm, clear, delicately formed and proportioned writing.

She did not touch the book.

"It's a copy of the limited edition," said Joyce, turning to the title-page, " with all the illustrations and then some. If you want to know what he's like to look at I can show you. It was specially copied from one of the heads in the *Adoration of the Magi* for his mother, and he gave it to me."

She turned another page on which, opposite to the table of contents, a circular miniature had been pasted showing a dark head in profile leaning a little sideways with downcast eyes.

" Cut the hair shorter and it's an almost perfect likeness," said Joyce.

" Why," asked Susan, " didn't you give this back to him ? "

" It was down in my week-end cottage when I broke things off," said Joyce Wentworth, " and he'd given it to me before we were engaged. Besides, it has a market value. I may sell it in a lean year. It has a set of photographs of those cartoons I told you about in a pocket at the back. Some collector might like to have them."

" Will you please take it away now," said Susan.

" Don't you want to look at all the illustrations ? You won't find them in any other copy."

" I should be afraid of losing or spoiling your book. It is too valuable to borrow/' said Susan.

" Oh, it's not so valuable as all that! I don't suppose I'd get more than five pounds for it, if I took it to Sotheby's tomorrow."

" Please," said Susan. " Go now. I would rather you went, now. I can get downstairs by myself."

The room had grown dark as they talked. Outside the window flakes of snow like grey freckles were dense against the glass.

" Damn ! " said Miss Wentworth. " The weather has broken."

" Hello ! " said Rita. " I thought the Wentworth was being a mother to you ! Why aren't you down at luncheon ? "

" I waited on purpose. I knew you'd be coming up. I want to tell you something."

" Can't you tell me at lunch ? I'm ravenous."

" No. It's something horrid—about Miss Wentworth."

" Good ! " said Rita.

" Rita, she knows Mr. Frome! She says he wanted to marry her."

" Poor mutt! "

" She said horrid things about him. I'm sure they're not true."

" What sort of things ? "

" Well, for one—and it's the worst—she says he's hiding because he stole some drawings."

" What a crew these art critics are ! Did she say he was hand and glove with our stepfather ? Was it the cartoon for our Elijah he stole ? "

" Oh, Rita! It's serious. She says he's hiding."

" At Maze House ? "

" Of course it isn't true. But I just wanted to warn you—because you might so easily tell her he was there."

" Can you see me exchanging girlish confidences with that bitch ? "

" You might let it slip without meaning to."

" Right ! If she mentions his name to me I'll say he's gone to the Sandwich Islands. Did she tell you what X stands for ? "

" I found that out myself in Geneva. It's X,A,V,I,E,R."

" And you've kept it from me all this time ! "

" I wasn't quite sure how to pronounce it."

" That's a pity," said Rita. " You'll just have to spell it every time you think of him. Isn't this snow the limit! "

3

The snow fell steadily for thirty-six hours. The view from the great semicircular window

of the lounge was blotted out by the clouds which filled the air above and below the terraces. Every form of winter sport was at a standstill. The more restless visitors battled their way to the electric trains and went down to Montreux to shop and to see films by day, and came back with discouraging reports at nightfall. It was more cheerful after dark. Dancing began at tea-time and went on till midnight. The cocktail bar was crowded. Someone got up a ping-pong tournament. There were rumours of a concert. Already nerves were suffering from the change in the atmospheric pressure. Small feuds began to spring up between the various sets in the hotel.

It was Sir Claud Baynes who hit on the idea of a tombola. Joyce Wentworth had succeeded in detaching him from the Adderley sisters by the time-honoured expedient of suggesting that they were both man-crazy. The result had not been altogether satisfactory. Her warning had had the effect of deflecting his interest from herself, as well as from the girls she slandered. He had followed up young Claparede's information about the selection of dance music made by the leader of the string orchestra and had made the acquaintance of its leader.

When the third day showed little promise of better weather he sought out Miss Went-

worth and suggested that she should help him to organise a lottery for the band.

" It's better than passing round the hat, as they do on board ship. These johnnies have done more than their bit towards keeping things going, and I think we might raise much more with a tombola, than by a mere collection. More amusing too."

" What is your idea of prizes ? " asked Miss Wentworth, full of helpfulness.

His idea was that everybody should be asked to contribute some object or other, as well as to buy tickets, and that the prizes should be exhibited. If anything of real value were forthcoming they might hold an auction. In any case it would provide occupation and amusement for the crowd, and the musicians would benefit. He had seen the same thing done with great success at Biarritz some seasons ago.

Elated at being chosen as the first collaborator in this scheme, Joyce Wentworth set about getting it afoot with all the energy she could put into organising any business. In her desire to retain the goodwill she felt she had lost for twenty-four hours she decided to make the most sensational and interesting contribution to the prizes herself.

" I was annoyed with my maid for packing this," she said as she brought the book to him

in the private sitting-room the management had put at the Englishman's disposal for the business of dealing with the prizes, " but it's a god-send now. I have no personal reasons for keeping it any longer, and it might be auctioned, if you think anybody in this crowd knows enough to care about having it."

She laid the book on a table and he stood up, turning over its pages.

" I saw another copy, in the original binding, in that shop in Graf ton Street the other day," he said. " They asked seven guineas for it. It's a pity this one has been rebound."

" I had it done at a time when its cash value was of no importance to me," she answered.

He turned back to the fly-leaves and saw the inscription.

" You are sure you want to sell it ? " he asked after a pause, without looking at her.

" I could sell it for myself, naturally. But I want to give something of value to your scheme. It might fetch five pounds in the auction. One of those Adderley minxes, the one who has a sprained ankle, was reading it in a Guillemot reprint yesterday. She might bid for it. It's autographed."

He closed the book.

" I don't suppose you'd care to supply a note verifying the authenticity of the autograph," he

said. " As it stands it is incomplete."

" I will, if you like," she said, beginning to feel uneasy.

" You'd not mind it being auctioned—your certificate of authenticity, I mean ? "

" Oh ! but I *want to help*"

" You are, giving your time and enthusiasm. If you really wish to part with this book I will add ten pounds to the subscription list in your name and keep it for myself."

" How generous of you ! " she gasped.

" Then I may keep it ? "

" But of course."

He took a penknife from his pocket and very slowly cut out the fly-leaf on which her name was written.

" This," he said, handing the sheet of paper to her, " is naturally of no value to me."

It was with an effort that she restrained her hands from tearing the page into shreds.

" You are too quixotic," she said.

The weather cleared at noon, and after luncheon there was a general exodus from the hotel. As a good deal of fresh snow had fallen Rita and Mrs. Elmslie decided that Susan had better not go out until the road to the ice-rink had been cleared and she was left to write letters or to read by herself until tea-time. Claud

Baynes, who was expecting his sister to arrive that afternoon, came in just before three o'clock and saw her sitting in the big circular window of the lounge.

" Hello ! " he said. " You look rather forlorn."

" That's how I feel," said Susan. " I've just finished a book and I wish it had gone on and on."

" Can't you begin at the beginning again ? "

" I could, but it has fringes all round it that I want to know about."

" Some book ! "

" Some book," agreed Susan.

" I wonder if I can guess what it is."

She held out the yellow Guillemot to him.

" You needn't bother to guess," she said listlessly.

This was not the kind of answer most girls would have made to such an opening as he had given her. Joyce Wentworth's man-trap was not living up to her description. He tried again.

" You know," he said, " it's an odd coincidence. *I've just bought a copy of this.*"

" Do you know him ? " asked Susan.

" Frome ? Yes. That is to say, we were at Oxford together. I've lost sight of him now."

" On purpose ? "

" Lord ! no. He was one of the nicest fellows I ever knew, but we went different ways. At least

he went his way and became a big bug, while I just fluttered about."

" Like a butterfly."

" Like a butterfly."

" That's a pity/" she sighed.

" Grieving over my wasted life ? "

" Oh no. I just felt sorry you couldn't tell me any more about—about the book."

"I'd have given it to you with pleasure—but I threw it down the gorge just now. I didn't like the binding."

" Were there pictures in it ? "

" Lashings of 'em. There was a pouch in the back full of photographs of some drawings. I kept those. They hadn't been given gilded margins by the previous owner."

" How queer ! " said Susan ; but she did not say that she had seen a book like this yesterday. She did not want to speak of the person who had shown it to her.

Her manner was discouraging. He turned to leave her.

" Oh," she said, " if you would let me see the drawings."

"Right," said Claud Baynes. "I'll bring them down here."

There were six of them : facsimiles made in Vienna with Frome's own annotations on the back of each plate.

¹¹ You know/' he said, " the originals have disappeared."

" Yes," said Susan. " I suppose Mr. Frome must be very unhappy about that/'

" I shouldn't think so. They weren't his property. He's probably got plenty of these. I hear he's at work on another book now."

" Yes," said Susan demurely, " I did know."

She turned over the sheets, narrowing her eyes to read the faint pencilled writing on the backs. Did she, he wondered, know how closely her profile, as he saw it against the rosy sky outside the great window, resembled that of the figure she was studying ?

" I had thought," he said, " of having them auctioned after the tombola tonight."

" No," cried Susan, " you can't do that. Suppose nobody bids for them, or suppose they went to someone who didn't care. Don't you want them for yourself ? "

" No, not really. The eighteenth century is my period, so far as I've got one at all. Baynesford is Queen Anne—Chinese wallpaper—bow-fronted Chippendale and what-not. We began as oriental merchants. Nothing Pre-Raphaelite about us. Our picture gallery is full of Fuseli and Carlo Dolci; portraits by Sir Thomas Laurence and battle-pieces by Benjamin West."

" These wouldn't take up much room/" pleaded Susan.

" I suppose I don't know you well enough to give them to you right away."

" I'm afraid you don't," she sighed.

" But you could borrow them, till I know you better."

" Could you lend them to me till tomorrow ?"

" Or even the day after."

" Thank you," said Susan. " I think I'll take them up to my room. People are beginning to come in to tea."

"I'll help you to the lift," he said, holding out his hand as she began to get out of her chair.

" I can walk now—with a stick. But if you'd just walk beside me in case I side-slip ..."

They were waiting for the lift when a telegram was brought to him.

"Hullo!" he said, reading it. Then, "Here's trouble ! My sister has had an accident to her car—in Lausanne. I'll have to get down there at once."

" Is she hurt ? "

" I think so, or she wouldn't have wired for me." As they went up together Susan remembered the tombola.

" Joyce Wentworth can run it single-handed," he said. " That reminds me. I'll have to see her before I go."

It was not until he had left her and she had reached her own room that Susan realised she had not thought of asking him where she should send the *Vita Nuova* drawings in case he did not return to Caux before they went back to Geneva at the end of the week.

CHAPTER VIII

FROME had thrown a fresh log on to the fire behind the nursery fender and the flames leaped and sparkled in the grate, sending little whiffs of aromatic smoke out into the room where they made blue, changing patterns across a shaft of sunlight from one corner of the east window. Soon the sun would be gone for the day and he would be able to settle down to his writing. The sun was an interruption. So long as it moved across wall or floor the room changed its shadows and the balance of colour rose and fell and shifted. The temptation to watch for the moment when one particular corner or group of furniture was converted into a picture by the angle from which the sunlight fell on it, and then was destroyed as the shaft moved on to compose another, beset him less up here than it had done downstairs in either of the south- or westward-facing rooms where the day was longer and more constant. It was easier to write, as it was easier to paint, in a room with a north aspect. The mind did change with the

changing sky. Frome, who needed to see before he began to think, who wrote first of the thing seen and then of the considerations which followed sight, was restless till noon in this room where children had played in the sunlit morning for an hour on so many days of so many years before he came to work there. He went to one of the two north windows and looked across the lawn below, to the wall of the yard which hid the kitchen in the opposite wing from sight.

For three days since he had come to work up here he had seen the yellow cat, bunched in its fur, on the top of the wall, sheltering against a granite globe that held down the flat corner-stone. When the shadow of the nursery wing crept over his sunning-place Isaac would vanish, to reappear on the dining-room window-sill at one o'clock. His departure was Frome's signal for sitting down to the notebooks and foolscap he had fidgeted with for half an hour or more. This morning Isaac was not there.

The leafless tendrils on the wall were stirred by light gusts of wind blowing from the east. The cat had evidently found it cold on the top of the wall and had gone in to a fire.

Frome drew a box of photographs towards him, and, opening it, began to examine enlargements of the rings and brooches worn by various women painted by Ingres, comparing them with

other photographs of actual jewels of the period.

He had reached the penultimate chapter of his book, which was to end with Winterhalter and the early Millais, and was making his final selection from the material he had collected. How stereotyped they were, these parures of the Second Empire and Mid-Victorian England : one design modified and adapted to a set of ear-rings, necklace, brooch and bracelets with their detachable pendants ; their hooks and hinges; the thin gold of their leafy settings; their well-matched arrays of amethyst, turquoise, garnet, aquamarine ; all the semi-precious stones which went out of fashion for a decade or so and then reappeared in what he called the Moonstone Beadery Period, that aesthetic reaction against the horrible chokers and tiaras of the eighteen-nineties.

Half-way down the box he came on the photograph he had made of a set of carved pale coral which had belonged to his own great-grandmother. It had been bought on her honeymoon in Italy, an intricate lovely twisting of fruit and flower, of leaf and stem, fashioned to hang or wreath or cluster in pendant and bracelet, in ear-ring and brooch; rich in design, simple in the use of one substance only, the rose pale coral so delicately cut that, as the light moved over its smooth texture, the depth of the carving took

T

on a richer hue as though each tiny blossom and berry held a living ichor. Once, to please him when he was a child, his mother had worn them for an evening when they were at home by themselves. They had seemed queer and old-fashioned to her conventional taste ; only fit to be used for fancy dress, she said. Now, as he looked at the design, he saw that it was the beautiful, hand-carved, artist's work that had, even to his young eyes, distinguished it from the stamped and moulded articles of commerce. Child as he was then, he had disliked his mother's half-hoop diamond rings and stiff bracelets, preferring the corals she would only put on in fun.

" I shall make my wife wear them every day/" he had boasted.

" Perhaps the fashion will have come round to them by the time you have a wife," she had said.

He remembered this scrap of the talk of thirty years ago as he looked at the glossy plate and wondered whether he could write to the bank, where all his mother's jewels were now in store, and ask them to post him the case which had been sent back there by the photographer.

It had never occurred to him to give the coral set to Joyce Wentworth. He had no-one to whom he could give it now. He was a confirmed celi-

bate. But he would like to have the actual corals themselves to look at while he wrote the final summary of his book, which would end where machine-made reduplication of patterns took the place of the lost, and the too rarely preserved, jewels of his theme. If ever he had had a wife, she should have worn none but such jewels as these.

He found himself thinking of the Vicar's ruminations over their cigars after dinner on Christmas Day.

" People talk of the bonds of matrimony : but to the vast majority marriage is really a liberation; it sets a man free to bend his whole mind on the work he has to do in the world. No man is quite sure of himself until the home from which he sets out, and, more importantly still, to which he knows he will return, is established, as only marriage can establish it. It is better to be burdened a little than to be restless. To be what you call free, is to be conscious of a quest, a danger, an unfulfilment."

There was a soft thumping against the door, followed by sounds of scratching.

" Bother that cat! " said Frome, putting the photograph of his grandmother's corals into the box again.

The thump was repeated, this time with a

rattle at the door-handle. Frome had seen Isaac dealing with door-handles already and knew that the process would be repeated until the door was opened, either by the operation of feline jumping or by human agency. It was better to let Isaac in than to sit there and be disturbed by the attack.

But Isaac did not want to come into the nursery, even though he saw a good enough fire blazing for him there when the door opened. He stood outside, and purred a little with rather condescending flattery, till Frome tried to close the door again ; then he put one yellow paw round its edge, and, opening his large mouth to its widest pinkness, uttered a surprisingly small mew.

" What in the name of . . ." began Frome, but the cat did not wait to hear the unnecessary question. He wanted to go into the first bedroom on the left: the door-handle was set too high for him to jump at; he had fetched the man from the study to turn it for him.

Gawkrodger had evidently been into the room that morning, for the curtains were drawn back and the window was open. The sun was round at that side of the house by now and the place was almost as warm as the nursery Frome had left. He had not been into this room since the day when he had looked at the little anthology which still slanted between the two nuns' heads

on the shelf opposite the door. He took the book from its place and began to turn the leaves, looking for another marking. There were several blank pages after the index of first lines at the end of the volume, and, on one of these, some verses were copied out in a handwriting so large and curly that the longer lines stretched across the whole double page of the opened book. The poem had no title.

*" The strange white beast came silently into the
forest,
Where among dark trees the lovely lady sat.
He curled his feet together under his belly,
And lay down with his head on the lovely lady's
lap.*

*Then little gold flames ran through the grass of
the forest.
Circling the place where the lovely lady sat.
They spurted like rain up from the green of the
forest.
While the strange white beast drowsed on with
his head in her lap.*

*The strange white beast came down to the pool
to drink,
And the scum on the pool rolled back to the
starlit brink.
In jet-black water star upon star appears;*

*They halo the head of the beast with a quiver of
spears
As muzzle to mirrored muzzle the unicorns
drink:'*

There was no name at the end of this queer, inconsequent, pictorial fragment. He wondered if she had written it herself. It made him think of *La Dame et la Licorne* and the soft blue and rose of the French tapestry as he had last seen it one dim, April morning in Paris nearly a year ago ; but there were no flowers in this picture, only little gold flames and icy stars and the whiteness of the unicorn drinking from the forest pool. . . . He began to read the verses again.

A sharp clatter broke into his bemusement. He looked back from the window into the room to see what Isaac had knocked down, but Isaac had disappeared. Then he noticed a stirring of the green curtain that hung from the shelf along the wall. For a moment he thought the wind was moving in it: but the room was still and sheltered and full of sunlight. Presently, from under the hem of the curtain, he caught sight of half of Isaac's tail. The cat had evidently found something behind the curtain and was trying to get it out. Frome hoped he had not caught a mouse there—but a mouse would

not have made a noise like wood against wood, or of breaking glass. Isaac was now visible to the full extent of his back legs and the noise he was making had nothing to do with mice. Frome stooped and lifted the curtain from the furry tail.

" Come out, Isaac," he said.

Isaac came out and began to wash his face and ears, dissociating himself completely from whatever it was he had clawed and broken behind the curtain.

Frome was on his hands and knees now. There were splinters of glass on the floor. He raised the curtain with one hand and with the other drew out the grey wooden frame with Susan's photograph in it from the hiding-place Gawkrodger had found for it five months ago.

CHAPTER IX

I

IT was in Lecco that Susan found the Diaphaenicon.

Marcel had driven her down from Maloya that morning. He had done this, partly because Rita and the Elmslies had gone for a whole day's ski-ing tour up to the Forno hut to celebrate the last Saturday of their six weeks in the Engadine—an expedition which Marcel condemned as not worth the effort or the money involved—and partly because Susan had said at dinner on Friday night that she was tired of winter, especially of this glittering, sun-hard, blue-skied winter where the pine trees showed black against whiteness and the iridescence of new fallen snow congealed into smooth weights on their branches when the night's frost-buds melted at noon. Though it was the beginning of March the only real flowers to be seen were the fabulously expensive hot-house blooms, crowded together behind the vapour-dimmed

show-cases of the florists' stalls in hotel lobbies, and in the windows of the little flower-shops.

They had started after an early breakfast. Marcel had been too much engrossed in negotiating the hairpin bends that take the road two thousand feet down from the Chateau Belvedere to the road through the Bregaglia—and in wondering if he could get the chains taken off his tyres before they reached Promontogno—to talk, and Susan had been too sleepy for the first half-hour to ask any questions. She had danced till the band began to put away its fiddles last night. Her head was still full of crooning melodies and the reedy echo of the saxophone, played by a very dark negro with very white hair.

She had enjoyed her evening. It was Claud Baynes who had persuaded them to come over to Maloya for those last days. He and his sister were staying there, as the snow was better for ski-ing at that end of the valley in March and April, and their hotel catered for English visitors in a way the Adderleys would find refreshing after the fabulous luxury and Swiss cooking of the Suvretta Haus.

Susan had danced with Claud for half the evening. He did not dance so well as Marcel, but he was easier to talk to ; not only because conversation with him was free from the trammels of being an English lesson as well as an exchange of

remarks, but because he had not a career to talk about. He was too old—about thirty—to do this, for one thing, and also his career had been fixed for him when he was born. It wasn't a career—it was just looking after his property, and making speeches at Cattle Shows, and hunting and shooting and fishing—and, since Christmas this year, skating and ski-ing, or, when Susan or Rita would be his partners, dancing. It was wonderful how interesting his conversation about these quite ordinary things had seemed to her, ever since she had got over the little embarrassment of trying to give him back the drawings he had left with her at Caux. He had pretended to have forgotten about them at first, and then he remembered perfectly—every word she had said.

" You told me you had not known me long enough to take them—that was in the beginning of January. Now you have known me for almost three months/'

" Only just over two, and not all the time," protested Susan.

" January, February, March — are three months—and I have known you all that time continuously. I can go on knowing some people when they are miles and miles away—I met you at Caux; I've found you again in the Engadine. A few weeks' interval makes no difference. These

huge hotels are so like one another we might as well have spent every day in either of them ; eating the same food, served by the same waiters, to the sound of the same music/

" Not quite the same," said Susan. " It was stranger at Caux—more to listen to than to dance to."

He nodded and was silent till the music ceased. Then he said :

" My sister and your sister are going to the Forno-hiitte tomorrow. That's a bond between us."

" It would be more of a bond if I were going too," said Susan.

" We could go somewhere else together—or just stay here and skate and take your mother into Hansselmann's at Sils-Maria to tea," he suggested. " I think the scent of vanilla and hot chocolate is richer there than in the St. Moritz one."

" Mother and Mrs. Elmslie have a curling match in the morning and a bridge party in the afternoon," she said. " That's why I'm going down to Bregaglia, to Italy, with Marcel."

" I play bridge very badly myself," he said.

" I'm running away from the bridge party."

" Isn't an Italian tour rather a heroic way of escape ? "

" I want to see sprouting grass and buds on

trees. I'm tired of snow," said Susan.

Even though he was so easy to talk to and understood what she did not quite say, she could not tell him that she wanted to see young grass and the first spring flowers—not in fields around Geneva, where they were going to stay till after Easter, but in Italy. Italy was only a few miles away from the snow and the ice and the crowds of men and girls all dressed in straps and trousers and woollen pullovers ; all carrying sticks and steel weapons of some kind or another with which to cut the ice and scar the snow; all of them so busy taking exercise and breaking records and collar-bones and organising, or being organised into, competitions and contests, that they had no time to look at anything but their own feet. Susan disliked the sight of human feet in thick woollen socks and zip-fastened ski-shoes. Even in skates they were not interesting to watch, as she still had to watch them a good deal because of her stupid accident which had prevented her from becoming proficient in any one sport, though she could dance for an hour at night without trouble now.

She did her best to prevent her mother from knowing how little she liked the very expensive holiday Rita appreciated so thoroughly. For a week or two the novelty and the young companionship had amused her; but lately it had

become more and more difficult not to show what Rita called disenjoyment. Six weeks of all this heartiness was too much.

When Claud Baynes and his sister—who had spent a month in a nursing home at Lausanne recovering from the cuts and bruises of her motor accident—turned up one day at St. Moritz, things had been better. The sister, a vigorous creature whose normally plain face was not improved by a scar across one cheek, was a confirmed winter-sports woman and led Rita on to greater heights and swifter descents than she had hitherto attempted, quite cutting out the young Elmslies who, in any case, were toboggan addicts and spent a great part of their time at Pontresina. Claud went with them once or twice, but, more often, he declared that a little gentle lugeing or a morning on the rink was all he could manage. On these days he spent his afternoons taking Mrs. Adderley and Mrs. Elmslie for what he called push-walks and bun-hunts, and in talking to Susan after tea. It did not occur to Susan that her mother was encouraging these late afternoon tete-à-tetes by going straight up to her room, when they came in from their excursions, and not appearing again until it was time for Susan to go up to dress and for her companion to get back to Maloya; nor did she attach any special significance to Mrs. Adderley's readiness to take her daughters for

three nights to Maloya herself, when Claud Baynes suggested it.

Morcomb had gone home to her sister in Brighton for a holiday, before the ardours of the spring tour and all its preparations set in, and Susan had helped her mother to pack while Rita went out for a ski-run which would land her at Maloya later in the day.

"You know, Susan/" Mrs. Adderley had said, "Marcel is coming up from Coire for this last week-end."

"Yes, Mother. I do think his bank lets him have a lot of holidays. He was here last week too."

"No, Susan—that was three weeks ago, and he more or less owns the bank. We must not hurt his feelings."

"We never do. He hasn't that kind of feelings."

"He's not quite a relation, of course."

"Brother-in-law once removed—but Rita and I couldn't be more sisterly to him if he were not removed at all."

"He mayn't want Lina Baynes for a third sister when he gets to Maloya, and he won't like the hotel there as well as this one."

"Oh," said Susan. "You think he'll be jealous?"

"He's an only son," said Mrs. Adderley,

" and he dances better than anyone else you know."

" He doesn't know how badly Lina Baynes dances," said Susan.

" He will tomorrow night/¹ said her mother, " but I didn't mean that."

" Shall I give this yellow frock to the chambermaid ? " asked Susan. " Morky won't let me wear it again in Geneva and I shan't need it if we're only going to be three nights at Maloya."

" Did you wear it at Caux ? "

" Yes, Mother—several times. It's the only one of those I've brought here that I did wear at Caux."

" I'm sure Costanza will like it," said Mrs. Adderley, " and, after all, being an Englishman must count."

Susan remembered this conversation as well as last night's talk with Claud : Marcel reminded her of it, not by anything he said, but by the way he was frowning as he drove along the road which was getting soggy with half-melted snow. He had not stopped frowning since he had reached Maloya at tea-time yesterday. He had danced a great deal with Rita, and not at all with Lina Baynes. It had been his own suggestion that he should drive Susan down to

Chiavenna next day. He had gone to telephone about the state of the road in the middle of dinner, and had come back announcing :

" Since I have business in the Bregaglia tomorrow and Susan wishes to see some grass and is unable for this long *tour du Forno*, I will take her down to the Como lake—perhaps even to Menaggio."

Mrs. Adderley had looked across to the table where Claud and Lina Baynes were dining, and, for a moment, Susan had wondered if she were going to announce that she had made some other plan; but all she said was :

" Don't forget to ask me for your passport tonight, Susan, if you're going across the frontier. I shall probably be asleep at eight o'clock in the morning."

The descent became more gradual, and Susan grew drowsy. At Castasegna there were fat buds on the great chestnut trees and snow had given place to grass on the roadside. Birds sang and fluttered, and the village goats were almost as enchanting as the lambs Susan had not missed until these wilder flocks recalled them.

" One day," said Marcel, " I shall take you to Soglio where there is nothing but goats—and the inn is an old palace of the de Salis with all the same *ameublement*.

He had stopped frowning.

Susan was so sleepy she could only smile back at him and say, " Furniture ! "

He took no notice of this correction, and presently she stopped looking at the Spring she had longed to see and closed her eyes and listened to the birds shrilling in the silence through which the car slipped down the miles into Italy. By the time they reached the frontier she was so fast asleep that she hardly stirred when Marcel pulled up the car and dealt with the customs officials. She did not hear him tell her that the rock she might have seen, while he went in to transact his business at the little bank in the *Piazza Castello*, was called *Paradiso*, though it had been known by a fiercer name in the days of Frederick Barbarossa.

Half an hour later she woke to feel the wind in her hair. They were driving swiftly along a level road and Marcel had pushed back the shutter in the top of the car and let down both windows. On the left a mountainside, broken by valleys, rich with gardens and vineyards, was threaded and bridged and tunnelled by a railway line, under and over which the road went, climbing and diving at times, but always keeping close to the blue, sail-flecked water of a lake—a lake unfrozen, rippled by the morning wind.

She was wide awake now. The oppression of her descent into the valley had gone and Marcel was driving at a speed that would have awakened anyone.

"Where are we?" she shouted. "Why are you in such a hurry?"

"There is a fall in the lira," he shouted back. "I shall go to Lecco. It is better than to telephone. There we have a bough."

She knew that he meant a branch, but she did not correct him. She had imagined that they would spend the rest of the morning in a wood or a little bay; lunch in some lakeside inn, and perhaps go into a church, or even see a picture gallery in one of the famous villas that could be visited, before it was time to start on the long climb back to winter. That was the sort of thing they would be doing if it had been Claud Baynes and not Marcel who had brought her here. Susan was frowning now, and though Marcel was not smiling he had a pleased and cheerful look. Speed, and especially the speed he could get out of his cherished *voiture*, was one of Marcel's ideas of happiness, and banking had, in the past six weeks, become its serious rival. Now he was enjoying both at once. Combining business with pleasure was the phrase for it. She shouted this description of his state to him and he nodded with the smile that gave brilliance

to his always handsome face. The wind had blown his carefully smoothed hair into a light froth of curls on his temples. He was very easy to look at: Susan was now so wide awake, so much exhilarated by speed and by the loveliness of the panorama through which they were speeding that she almost told him this, but it would have been a waste of breath. Marcel was making the best of a straight stretch of the road, trying to get the needle on the board up to 100 kilometres. Susan gave up her attempt at reducing this figure to miles and held her breath for joy as they slowed down to pass through Varenna and saw incredible gardens and villas and terraces climb up a promontory in mid-lake, dividing the waters.

"Bellaggio," shouted Marcel, and drove on.

Presently he asked her to tell him the time from her own watch : his had slipped under his wrist. Something, she gathered, closed at noon in Lecco. It was vital to be there within the next half-hour.

The lounge of the Hotel of the Maltese Cross and of Italy was no sort of place to sit in alone while Marcel dealt with the lira and the franc—the Swiss franc, so much less temperamental than its French namesake. Susan stayed there for ten minutes, during which she was conscious

of being a great disappointment to a dapper Italian officer who had very long eyelashes and a very short moustache and seemed to be waiting on springs for her to do or to say something, as though she were a dancer, or an actress, on the stage, whose performance he had paid to see, Rita would have known what to do, or how *not* to do anything in this situation, but Susan lacked the technique to deal with it. It was a relief when he was hailed by a magnificently coloured and decorated being who emerged from behind a latticed door, like a parakeet stepping out of its cage, and greeted him in a voice almost as deep and far richer than his own. As they walked off towards the restaurant Susan wondered what would have happened if she had come up to the young man's expectations. Would he have disentangled himself by himself or would she by now be so thoroughly entangled with him that she might have found herself involved in some frightful attempt at relinquishing him to the parakeet? She left the *gassosa alia fragola* Marcel had ordered for her unfinished—the mixture of fizzy lemonade and strawberry syrup only increased her thirst—and went out into the *Piazza Garibaldi*. Marcel's car was nowhere in sight. She supposed that the bank he had gone to visit was in some other street and she wandered on, looking for a shop where she

might buy a small gift for one of the Elmslies who was about to have a birthday.

It was hot in the Piazza and she was wearing woolly clothes, so she turned into the shade of a narrow passage between two tall buildings. This widened into a street of rather unpromising shops. They seemed to deal mainly in onions and macaroni. Just as she had decided to go back into the wider thoroughfare along which they had driven into the town, she saw a sign with the word *Antichità* hanging outward above a door that was reached by two steps going down from the narrow pavement. The small-paned window had not been washed for some time, but, by peering, she could make out one or two rather chipped and dreary marble busts and a piece of red-and-gold cut velvet, with frayed edges, draped across one corner of a very dark picture in a black frame propped up to hide the interior of the shop. The place had an odd look of existing for some purpose other than the sale of antiques. People must, she thought, have gone on not buying those marble busts and that indecipherable picture for years and years. Even through the dulled glass she could see a cobweb stretched across a fold of the velvet brocade.

She was about to turn away when a bony hand appeared round the picture frame, and.

grasping one of the marbles by the neck, moved it to one side in order to make room for a box-like object which was slowly propelled towards the light. Susan, stooping to examine this, thought she must be dreaming.

The box stood about eighteen inches high and was triangular in shape—a conic triangle with one clear glass face across a corner made of two more glass panels. These were painted with a perspective of trees in a thicket on the sides of a valley down which a stream fell to spread in a pool in the foreground of the scene. And—its feathery mane falling forward over its arched white neck, its gilded hoofs matching the gilded horn on its forehead—a unicorn, cut or pieced together out of some pearly substance, coral or nacre or alabaster, stretched its head forward, and, muzzle to muzzle, drank from the painted mirror where the painted stars on the top of the picture were reflected around its own reflection.

Crouched, with her hands on the low sill of the window, Susan looked and looked again. There were crocuses, yellow and white; flames in the grass on the margin of the pool; flames under the darkness of the trees on each side of the stream. It was all there—the last verse of the poem by a child she had found in a novel by a grown-up writer who knew how children dream; the poem she thought nobody but herself had

ever learned by heart. He must have known it by heart too, the artist who had built and painted this trap to catch a unicorn; who had given form to the substance of a poem he had understood so well that he had left the lady out of it and had left the strange white beast, alone with his strange white shadow, where the starlight set a quiver of spears round his mirrored head.

Susan could not remember afterwards going down the steps and opening the door; nor whether she had spoken in French, or in English, or in shopping Italian to the furtive and dingy person who came forward and closed the door behind her before he too spoke in answer to her question. She thought there were two people in the grove of bed-posts and curtain poles and carved empty mantelpieces that half-filled the shop, but only one materialised; only one was to be seen when she had learned that the thing she was enquiring about was called a Diaphaenicon and was the work of an English painter who had died a few months ago. It had been bought by an American lady who had taken a villa at Merati. She had tired of the toy which did not match the Milanese furniture. It had brought her bad luck, she said.

The man was speaking English with a queer hissing accent Susan did not recognise. He talked fast and used a great many words, almost

as if he were trying to cover up some other sound in the shop behind him.

" Perhaps," hazarded Susan, " if it is unlucky it may not be very expensive/

The man said—quite truthfully, thought Susan—that it was not the kind of thing he dealt in. He had bought it with other things of a more saleable nature. Would she consider four hundred lire an equitable price ?

" I've only got Swiss francs with me," said Susan, remembering that there was a crisis in exchange. " Would a hundred of those be enough ? "

The man was prepared to sacrifice the piece for a hundred and fifty Swiss francs, and asked if he could send it to the lady's hotel.

" I've not got a hotel," said Susan. " Will you wrap it up in plenty of soft paper ? We are going away by car—rather quickly."

" I shall spread cotton-waste around this glass first," he hissed.

Going to a cupboard near the window, he began to rummage there.

While she waited for her package to be made up, Susan looked round the shop. During the five minutes of her colloquy with its owner her eyes had grown accustomed to the dimness. Across the foot of a carved bedstead at the far end of the low room someone had flung a

circular black cloak. A soft, round, high-brimmed hat lay beside it. These were clearly not part of the stock-in-trade. Susan took a step or two nearer to them. They were well-brushed, little-worn garments—new and good, not at all the clothes the shopkeeper would be likely to wear over his rusty trousers and shrunken green pullover. Susan had seen that black, circular coat, or one very like it, more than once. She was quite sure that no two people pushed a soft hat into exactly that high-crowned shape.

There was a crash and the sound of breaking glass near the window: Susan turned quickly and went towards it.

" It's *not* the diaphaenicon ! " she cried.

The shopkeeper looked at her sideways with something that was half triumph, half watchfulness in his smile.

" No ! no ! It is only a piece of glass already broken. Here is your parcel, all soft and safe. And now I will offer you my thanks and say—*La ringrazio e la saluto, Signorina. I close my shop for the hour of the colazione.*"

He was shepherding her to the door—pretending to be an Italian—disguising his accent—hiding something about himself and his shop from her.

Susan, hurrying into the street, turned to the left and lost herself in a maze of narrow lanes.

The woman she asked to direct her either did not understand shopping Italian or answered in a language Susan could not follow. Presently she came to a long bridge across the mouth of a river that flowed into the lake. She stopped, leaning on the parapet to gaze at the lovely view. A little omnibus labelled " Piazza Garibaldi " jingled past her. She set out in the direction in which it had gone.

When she reached the Hotel of the Maltese Cross and of Italy it was nearly one o'clock. Marcel was so relieved to see her that he said less than he might have done about his anxiety, and the delay her truancy had caused them. He ordered a very good luncheon ; but he would not let her unpack the diaphanicon to show him while they waited for their omelette. He said he was sure it was very pretty and asked her what she had paid for it. When she told him, he explained that she had paid more than the naturally exorbitant price she had been asked. To cover her shame, Susan asked him about the crisis in the lira. It proved an excellent diversion.

2

It was not, of course, Susan's fault that a small but efficient avalanche had crashed down on the Bondasca side of the valley, and piled itself in a

heap of sticky mud and snow across the high-road. It would take hours to clear the road, and work could not begin on it until daylight. There was no possibility of getting beyond Castasegna when they arrived there at dusk. Indeed, if it had not been for the hour's delay in leaving Lecco, for which she was responsible, they might very well have driven right into the avalanche. So, in a way, she had saved their lives.

Not that anyone, so far as they knew, had been killed. The afternoon motor diligence had gone through to Maloya only ten minutes before the crash. The other north-bound traffic was held up. It was never heavy at this time of year after three o'clock. Some of the cars had turned back, but several people, who had reached Castasegna before Marcel and Susan, had decided to put up there in order to set out the moment the road ahead was clear in the morning. One of the two little hotels was full for the night: the other had only one room to offer *Monsieur et Madame*.

It was the stock situation of the novels of Mrs. Adderley's girlhood ; the coyly daring plot of which Rita made such fun ; the dilemma so common to the heavily virtuous films that came from Hollywood to replace those older sources of romantic fiction. Susan did not feel in the least like the heroine of any of these forms of

entertainment. Marcel was neither the almost, but never, *never* quite overwhelming temptation, nor the alternatively almost, but never quite, overwhelming tempter he should have been. He was very cross because Susan must have that one bedroom to herself: he did not try to make the best of such alternatives as the innkeeper could offer. There was also something else at the back of his mind.

He kept looking at Susan over the brim of his thick glass as he drank the Veltliner he had ordered with the dinner to which they sat down at half-past six, and Susan felt that each time he caught her eye he disliked her more. Once or twice he started to say something and then changed his mind. That it was something far from pleasant was perfectly clear.

When Susan had eaten enough of the sweet nutty Gruyere that had fewer holes in its substance than there were in the crumb of the sour grey bread served with it, Marcel said he was going out to look at the car and to try to get a telegram through to Maloya by sending it round by a system of lines he had worked out. The post-office was closed, but Marcel's foot was on his native soil and he knew how these things could be done.

" I have decided myself to indicate to your mother that we are not sleeping in the same

place/' he said, " and it will be more simple for you not to come with me while I do this. I will say good night."

Susan, though surprised, was pleased at being dismissed in this way. The thought of spending the rest of the evening with Marcel in his present mood had deepened her gloom. She went upstairs at once.

A black iron stove had been filled with wood and set burning in the bare-walled room where the two wooden bedsteads, each with its plump *duvet* covered in red twill, stood side by side, making her feel very dog-in-the-mangerish because she was keeping Marcel out of one of them.

She did her best, with the primitive washing arrangements and the comb and day cream in her handbag, to make some sort of toilet and then, by the light of the very bright electric bulb set high in the ceiling of the room, she unpacked her queer and lovely picture.

In the glare of the unfrosted lamp it showed translucent—and less dark in its background than it had seemed in the dirty shop. It was a night-piece still; but a night of midsummer from which the blue of day had not quite ebbed, in which starlight was silver and the flowers in the grass—fabulous, tawny flames, lighting the floor of June—showed yellower than the gold on the hoofs of the unicorn.

She carried it from chair to table ; cleared the wash-stand of its rough brown ewer and basin ; pulled the *duvet* from the extra bed to make a flatness where the case might stand, trying to find the best light for it. She discovered, in the course of these shiftings, that only one side and the top of the diaphaenicon were painted : the other two pieces of the little wedge-shaped scene were both of looking-glass. The whole thing was constructed to be placed in a corner, lit from the right. She knew then why it had been impossible to leave it among the dust and cobwebs of that evil little shop. It belonged to her, as the poem she had found in a lovely novel last summer belonged to her; more even than the poem other readers might take for their own. The dead painter had made it, knowing, with the secret foresight of artists, that it would fit exactly into a corner of the deep window-sill of her bedroom at Maze House, where the morning sun could sparkle through the painted stems and branches and glitter among their reflected shapes and where, at night, she could place the tiny porcelain lamp that had burned beside her cot in childhood and make its round white globe serve the unicorn in the office of a moon.

All the homesickness she had kept back for months—had danced on ; skated on ; trampled on; chattered down—rose up and proclaimed

the truth. She had done it for Rita's sake and for her mother's, who was so happy in the belief that the holiday she was enjoying so much herself was her sacrifice to her children. Suddenly she loved her mother with an understanding tenderness because she had tried to be happy for her sake. She would try again tomorrow. It would be easier after the long, disappointing day, the day she had thought to spend sitting on grass that was full of flowers, in an olive wood, watching the white sails of boats, and, in her mind's eye, seeing Flora and the nymphs of *Spring* threading their way through alternate sunlit and shadowed groves.

She had supposed that, once in Italy, she would find at least a reminder of the pictured world in which so much of her life since she left Maze House had been passed. And it had all been quite, quite unlike those pictures; a wild rush along roads, past towns and villages and endless hotels and proud, rich villas high in their terraced gardens; through gorgeous scenery there was no time to watch; to a hot little town and back again; overtaking other cars; fuming and hooting behind motor omnibuses which would not let them pass because there were so many curves; so many bridges ahead; to this bare wooden bedroom where she would have to spend the night, without pyjamas or a

dressing-gown, sleeping in her vest. The very thing which had made all the hurry and discomfort worth while—the three-dimensional picture she was now repacking to be ready for the morning's start—only made her longing to be at home again more desperate. She did not know how she was going to wait until next September. She wanted to go back tomorrow—*tonight*, and put her diaphanicon on the window-sill of her own room where she could see it when she woke and could go downstairs to find the one person in the world who would look at it with the same eyes as her own. She was too much bemused by nostalgia and fatigue to notice that she had no wish to banish the unseen stranger from the home from which his coming had ousted her. His image in her mind had grown so clear as she thought of him in the rooms she knew so well, that, when she thought of house or inhabitant now, she thought of them as belonging to one another and to her.

A knock at the door, just as she had pulled her woollen jumper over her head and was fighting her way out of its long sleeves and close neck, brought her back to the land of winter sports and to Marcel.

" Who's there ? " she called.

" Do not by any means open the door/"

hissed Marcel in a terrific whisper, " unless there is on the second bed a *duvet*."

Susan extricated herself from her pullover and slipped into her coat.

" It's all right," she called. " You can come in." Marcel did not come in.

Susan went to the door and opened it. Marcel was standing in the darkness holding an electric torch which was winking towards its last moment.

" The proprietor has relinquished to me his bed—but has taken his *duvet*, and I am cold," he said in an offended though stifled voice.

" Poor Marcel," said Susan. " What a shame ! They might have given you this one."

" Please to bring it to me, here."

Susan, with the inconsequence of fatigue, remembered the night-scene in *The Thirty-nine Steps* with Madeleine Carroll tied by the ankle to Robert Donat's leg. She began to laugh.

" Which imprudence ! " hissed Marcel. " A friend of my mother, from Basel, is in the hotel."

" Oh," gasped Susan, leaning against the doorpost. " It sounds like Consequences."

" Susan, I implore you, cease to have *fou-rire* and give that *duvet*. You have throw it on the floor."

Susan, half-strangled with the effort of keeping her hysterical laughter in check, picked up

the soft billowing mass of the crimson *duvet* and took it to the door. It smelt of geese and camphor.

As Marcel put both arms round the object which, being familiar, was not at all ridiculous to him, the torch slipped from his hand, fell on the uncarpeted boards with a crash and went out. The landing was not left in darkness. A door on the opposite side opened and a shaft of light from the room within added itself to the illumination against which Susan, tousled and nearly undressed under her coat, was completely visible.

"That's torn it," said Marcel, selecting one of Rita's idiotisms with the accuracy of desperation.

The door closed again.

"I'll leave mine open till you get downstairs," said Susan.

She did not connect Madame Lombart's friend from Basel with the chink of light Which had now vanished.

3

"I cannot understand," said Mrs. Adderley, "why you went all that way to such a dull little town, when all the usual places were nearer and more attractive."

" At first/" said Marcel, " Lecco is more near than Como. Second, I am known of sight in Como. If I shall be seen by a rival house the operation I make has risk to fail. Third, it is good for a serious business to be done as quiet as possible. If I am in Lecco to visit the new young bank of our establishment it is not remarkable."

" It sounds very sinister to me," said Rita, who was not at all in a good temper.

" There is nothing sinister until the avalanche and that is now disposed with."

" Of," said Susan faintly.

Marcel took no notice of this automatic reaction.

" The Bourse has a crisis: this," said he firmly, " is to blame of England. It is not my fault."

" It would be so much simpler," said Mrs. Adderley, " if there were no foreign exchange. Universal coinage and language too."

Marcel was shocked into momentary silence by this blasphemy, so Rita said :

" Esperanto isn't a howling success."

" It used to be Volapuk," said her mother, " when I was a girl—with conferences."

" And," said Marcel, recovering his breath, "it is not my fault that Emilienne's *marraine* is also in the same hotel and not asleep when Susan has *fou-rire*."

" My hat, Susan ! " said Rita. " She must have been comic to give *you* the giggles."

" I didn't see her," said Susan. " Marcel wanted a *duvet* and he came to fetch it and dropped his torch."

" You *are* lucid, my sweet."

" Stop chipping Susan, Rita. I'm sure she did not mean to disturb Emilienne's god-mother. Switzerland is such a small country. Everybody is somebody else's cousin or god-child. Just like the Scotch."

" In the aristocracy, yes," said Marcel, " and the *marraine* of Emilienne has backward ideas. She is, too, of the same class of religious instruction as my mother."

" I don't see why we need explore pre-history like this," Rita grumbled. " It isn't my idea of a pleasant Sunday afternoon."

Mrs. Adderley finished her coffee. Then she said :

" You and Susan had better go off and make the best of your last day. Marcel can take me for a walk presently."

She waited until the girls were out of ear-shot before asking :

" What is Emilienne's godmother's name ? "

" Frau von Stüchelberg—we call her Tante Amalia."

" And you think she will tell your mother

that she found you in Susan's room last night ? "

" I do not think—I know/" said Marcel.
" She has erotic imagination."*

" Frau von Stiichelberg was on her way home to Basel."

" There is always the post," said Marcel.

" Well, we shall all be in Geneva tomorrow,"

" Not all. I shall be at St. Gall."

" That will make things more comfortable."

" You do not know my mother."

" I knew her before you were born, Marcel."

" The marriage she desires for me is with Rita."

" Have you and Rita discussed this at all ? "

" No. It is with Susan I have spoken."

" Susan ? "

" Yes. I am—I was in love with Susan. But I am still too young. It is justly this which bores me. It is not in my career to marry for two years."

" Susan has not said anything to me about it," said Mrs. Adderley, " but she has been very absent-minded for some time."

" Naturally it is for me to speak with you. I have arranged to do this when I am in England next year—if I am still in love with her."

" Then you are not engaged to her ? "

" This long, long fiançailles—it is no more chic," said Marcel. " I have told this to Susan

—in the autumn. We were in a vine, on the Saleve."

" I think Susan must have forgotten about it," said Mrs. Adderley. " She seemed to like your friend Chapuisat more than anyone else while we were in Geneva."

" But he has no future," said Marcel, dismissing Chapuisat, " and now I am not sure that Rita is not more indicated. This too Emilienne believes, and she has experience."

" Then it is a good thing Susan isn't really engaged to you ! "

Marcel did not conceal his impatience with this stupidity.

" But now, *comme homme d'honneur*, I must be engaged to her," he said.

" As you do not wish to marry yet, you might get engaged to Rita as well for a time."

" Which idea ! " said Marcel; " besides, it is a question to marry at once. This will put Maman in position to exige that Tante Amalia has discretion. There is no escape."

" In that case," said Mrs. Adderley, " hadn't you better go and ask Susan if she will marry you at once ? "

" I have your consent ? "

" You must get Susan's first," said Mrs. Adderley.

Marcel rose with less alacrity than an ardent

suitor should display in setting out on such an errand.

" I think Sir Claud Baynes is waiting by the lift for them to come down," said Mrs. Adderley.

" I shall go up by the lift and wait for her in the corridor/" said Marcel.

Ten minutes later Marcel came back.

" Susan have said No," he announced, and it was clear that he was more astonished than distressed.

Mrs. Adderley smiled pleasantly.

" Dear Susan," she said. " That settles everything. I think I'll go up to my room and write letters. Is Frau von Stichelberg in the telephone book ? "

" Naturally," said Marcel, " but she will not be at Basel yet."

" It was her address I wanted," said Mrs. Adderley.

Rita had been on the ice for half an hour and was doing figures with Dan Elmslie when Susan came out on to the terrace carrying her skates.

" Going for a last spin ? " asked Claud Baynes, who had managed to disentangle himself from his sister and others.

" I thought I would," said Susan.

She looked as though she had been crying. He had seen that handsome young Swiss, who was some sort of cousin or in-law, drive off with a suitcase and his skis on the top of his car just before she came out. Had there, he wondered, been trouble over their hold-up yesterday? The Elmslie woman had been rather idiotic about it, letting everybody know that the young things had not come back at dinner-time. He had admired the apparently vague and yet effective way in which Mrs. Adderley had managed to broadcast the telegram that came through later in the evening. They had all seemed very jolly at luncheon today. All but young Lombart. And now he had gone and Susan was no longer in the least jolly.

" Sorry it'll all be over tomorrow ? " he asked as they laced on their boots.

" It won't," said Susan. " We're going back to Geneva until after Easter."

" And I, alas, have to chaperone my sister and her young man across to New York next week."

" I didn't know she had a young man," said Susan dully.

" She's only just found out herself—by cable."

" Oh," said Susan.

They were on the ice by now. He noticed

that, as they passed Rita and her partner, Susan turned to look after her sister, who did not seem to see her. He could not be sure of the slight choking sound he caught above the long sweeping grind of steel on ice as they went swinging down the rink. When they passed the figure-skaters a second time there was no doubt at all that Rita had seen them and had deliberately turned her head away ; nor could he be mistaken about the sound that came from the girl at his side. She was almost as tall as he was and through the thickness of his own gloves and hers he had felt the little clutch of her hands in his.

" I say ! " he said. " I've got hiccups too. Let's go in and have drinks."

Susan's face was turned away from him.

" B-be-fore tea ? " she gasped.

" Long before tea," he said. " Mental exercise is what I need this afternoon."

He found a couple of empty chairs in a dim corner of the lounge and ordered two Schneider cups.

" Aren't they very strong ? " asked Susan.

" Very," he said. " Weak ones are no good at this time of day."

" And now," he said, when she put down her empty glass, " I am going to teach you to smoke." •

" But I can, only I don't much."

" I'm glad you can. It's such a help to conversation."

She tried to say that she needed no help when she talked with him, and then, though she did not know how it had come about, she was telling him how she had bought a unicorn in a wood yesterday, and of the queer name the man in the shop had given it.

" I've seen 'em," he said, " at the Leicester Galleries—a whole show of them, but I don't think yours was there."

" The worst of it is," said Susan, " now I've got it, I don't know how I'm going to manage to take it about with me till we go home in September. You see there's not enough room as it is for everything in Rita's car, and Morcomb (that's our maid) makes difficulties about parcels."

" Getting one's heart's desire is apt to be inconvenient when it comes to parcels."

" Even without parcels it is disappointing."

" You have found it so ? "

" Yesterday," said Susan, " was terrible."

It was easy, after that, to make her talk. He listened, uttering appropriate sounds of sympathy or agreement. When it came to the crimson *duvet* and the godmother from Basel, he laughed very helpfully.

" I laughed too," said Susan, " but it was quite the worst thing to do."

" Why ? "

" The consequence is," said Susan, two bright spots of colour burning in her cheeks, " that everybody thinks I ought to marry Marcel."

" Not everybody."

" My mother does—and Rita."

" And, one presumes, Monsieur Marcel himself."

" Well," said Susan, " that's the queer part about it. He says his mother expects it—and that he told me so in Geneva—but I didn't notice what he was saying."

" That ought to have discouraged him."

" It was rather rude of me, I suppose, but I was thinking of something else at the time."

" And he has repeated his offer ? "

" In the corridor—upstairs—outside our room. He was waiting when I came out, and, before I could finish explaining that it was quite a mistake, Rita came out too and they both seemed to think I'd known all the time."

" How tiresome of them ! Especially of your sister."

" Rita thinks I'm a dog-in-the-manger."

" Does she want to marry him herself ? "

" I don't think she wants to marry anyone just

yet, but she says I've taken Marcel from her and thrown him away and that it was a cad's trick."

" Strong language."

" It was stronger than what I told you. Pm afraid I must have deserved it—just out of carelessness. But that only makes it worse for Marcel."

" He seems to have been a bit tactless in his wooing."

" That wasn't his fault. You see, my mother sent him to ask me, there and then."

" How has she taken your refusal ? "

" I don't know," said Susan. " I haven't seen her since Marcel told her. I expect she's comforting him."

" Unless she was hidden in the back of his car just now, she can't be doing that."

" In Marcel's car ? "

" Yes : he went off, bag and baggage, about ten minutes before you came down."

" I was bathing my eyes," said Susan.

" Very sensible of you," he said.

" What made me cry was Rita—at least it was both of them. You see I didn't know how shattering having a proposal is, and Rita has always been on my side about everything else."

" Do you suppose she'd be on your side if someone else proposed to you and you said 'yes' ? "

" It would depend on who it was," said Susan, " but I hope nobody will again."

" Never ? "

" Not for a long time."

" And it wouldn't be Marcel ? "

" Oh no ! "

" Susan," he said, " you've told me so much. Will you tell me something else ? Something I really want to know quite seriously ? "

" What is it ? "

" Is there anybody else ? "

He saw that she was surprised at his question, and that, at first, she did not know the answer. When she found it, it was an even greater surprise to her. The bright colour ebbed from her cheeks ; her eyes were dark as she looked beyond him with parted lips, seeing some other face than his.

" Yes," she said at last. " I didn't know, till now."

" Is it," he said, determined not to lose his way in the mazes of her inexperience, " is it someone here—in this hotel ? "

" Oh no," she sighed, " not in this country."

He took rather a long time over lighting a fresh cigarette. Then he said :

" Lucky young man."

" He doesn't know. Nobody knows. I didn't know myself till you asked me."

His heart lightened ridiculously. The child probably imagined herself to be in love with a film star. He could not push his enquiry further yet: she was looking strained and tired now that the effect of the cocktail he had made her drink had worn off. She had had enough emotional upset for one day. He'd like to wring young Rita's neck for her jealousy. But that would blow over. The girl's mother would know how to put her children to rights. It was dawning on him that Mrs. Adderley had had her own reasons for precipitating the situation. Susan had taken it hard ; but the problem of Marcel *had* been disposed of, for the time being.

" If I were you," he said, " I'd go and make a clean breast of it to your mother."

" There's nothing to make a clean breast of," said Susan. " At least ..." her voice died away. " She's on Marcel's side," she ended, obviously changing the direction of her thought.

" Don't you believe it," said Claud Baynes.

" Darling," said Mrs. Adderley, " I didn't know you'd mind it so much. Rita refuses her young men quite cheerfully."

" She's used to it," said Susan, " and you're always on her side."

" I'm on your side. Rita has behaved like a pig. I'm going to put you to bed now—here in

my room—and we'll have dinner sent up."

" For both of us ? "

" Yes."

" How cosy ! "

" Rita can dine at the Elmslies' table—or with the Bayneses."

" Claud Baynes is most terribly kind."

" He's nice and tall, too," said Mrs. Adderley in a dulcet voice.

"He's going to America next week."

" Much better than coming to Geneva."

" Oh—Mother. I don't want to go back to Geneva—not now—with all the fuss there's going to be. Can't we—can't we go home ? "

Mrs. Adderley ignored this request.

" You can have one of my Pine-cone tablets in your bath," she said.

Half-way through dinner Susan returned to the attack.

" It's not only because of Marcel and Emilienne and Madame Lombart that I don't want to go back to Geneva, Mother."

" Darling ! *Not* that student in theology."

" Oh no. I should like to see him again. It's something much, much worse."

Mrs. Adderley laid down her fork.

" Like the food at this hotel after the Suvretta Haus."

" I didn't notice there was a difference," said

Susan. " This mousse is quite good. It's something I've done—at least, it's something that happened and I didn't tell you."

" In Geneva ? "

" Before—and in. You see, it was silly at first and then it was difficult, because of you—of—well ..."

" I knew Simon was up to no good. What has he been persuading you to do, Susan ? "

" I did it without persuading—it was my fault—I didn't want to have scenery—and when Claud said I'd better make a clean breast of everything to you, I suddenly felt I must tell you."

" Had you told Claud about Simon ? "

" Oh no ! I was dreadfully ashamed that I'd told him about Marcel—but there was a fog in my mind and he got me out of it, and now I see I ought to have told you from the beginning—only, at the beginning, I didn't know he had anything to do with you. And he can't have gone all round the world by now and be back again."

" He always travelled suddenly," said Mrs. Adderley ; " it was most uncomfortable. Like the trap-doors on the stage in pantomime. They frightened me when I was a little girl. I had a dreadful nightmare once—after one of those popping-up scenes. It was in *Aladdin*. A witch's cave."

" The shop in Lecco was like a witch's cave."

" I suppose Simon was buying antiques there and frightened you."

" It was his hat and cloak. He was behind a curtain I think. I didn't see him. I was only sure afterwards that he must have been there. I'm so afraid he'll go to Geneva to see Basil and I don't want to begin it all over again."

" Marcel did say that Lecco was a good place for secret business. That was one reason why I knew you would refuse him."

" Mother, you were married to Simon. You know what he is like. He is amusing and he does kind things—and it is all wrong, and you can't help yourself."

" Of course," said Mrs. Adderley, " you are partly your father's child. Tall, and thinking no evil."

" I think a great deal of evil about Simon and I picked up his book and never told you—and about the ones he sent—that's why I want to confess."

Susan was too much wrapped up in her own difficulties to notice the look of relief that came into her mother's face, nor was she aware of the change from the increased inconsequence, which often marked Mrs. Adderley's manner when she was encouraging others to be direct, to a very clear and intelligent questioning by which

she had elicited the whole story from Susan before the floor-waiter came in to wheel out the dinner waggon.

" Just like Simon to let you help him over the bit about having come from Spain. And it was quite useless, because none of us saw his M. Dubois. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings . . . He once brought two rings that had belonged to a Pope or an Emperor, over from Paris, in Basil's bonnet when he was a baby. We couldn't think why the poor child cried so and moved his head about, until we were in the boat-train to London and the nurse took it off."

" Oh ! Mummy ! It was wicked but exciting—and I want to laugh. Was that why you tried to take my gazelle pin away when I found it in your long-clothes doll ? "

" Yes, Susan. In a way I felt I ought to send it back to him. He wouldn't have hidden it in my old doll unless it had been very unusual—and valuable. But it seemed almost as dishonest to let him have it as to keep it. So I kept it. I should have had to send it back through Mr. Vulliamy and he might have been incorruptible and legal and got Simon into trouble."

" I suppose he has never been in trouble himself ? "

" Only almost I think. You see he doesn't *feel* things much."

" You do see now why I can't go back to Geneva, in case I should meet him there again. I'm sure he'll go to Basil's flat, now he's back in Europe. It would just add meshes to the net, though of course it would be simpler for me because you'd be in it with me."

Mrs. Adderley rose, went over to the dressing-table and began to arrange her hair and touch up her face.

" Susan," she said, without looking round, " how would you like to go again on that tour of the English Cathedrals the Southernwood Sixth Form does at Easter ? You remember, Miss Van der Mayne spoke about it when we met her in Paris. She said one or two of the old girls were joining them this year. I know you have done it once—but you've always wanted to do it again. You wouldn't mind going straight back from here to Southernwood for the last days of term. Morcomb can send on your things from the flat and we'll get the Little Quickness to forward your skates and skis and that queer picture, to Maze House, in a packing-case."

Susan leapt out of bed and ran across the room to throw her long arms round her mother where she stood in front of the mirror.

" Angel," she said, kissing the back of her neck. " You do have the most absolutely radiant ideas."

She saw her mother's face in the glass. There were tears in the eyes that looked back at her.

" Why, darling ! " she said, and then stopped. " I *am* a selfish pig. I don't really *want* to leave you ; but you'll be tremendously happy with Rita."

" I think you may be wrong about Simon going to Geneva," said Mrs. Adderley, blowing her nose delicately with her chiffon handkerchief.

Susan did not remember until after her mother had turned out the bedside light and settled into her pillows that, clean as the breast she made had been, it still harboured one unconfessed folly. But that *was* her own secret. Keeping it could do nobody any harm. She had almost told Claud Baynes. She thought he might have understood. Her mother was asleep now, breathing regularly and softly. Susan was alone in the night with the secret that had flowered into the strangeness of being in love with someone she had never seen—quite suddenly, that afternoon. He was in a wood with her now, under the stars, watching a little white unicorn drinking from a pool: but the wood was lit by daylight through laden orange branches and the flowers in the grass were no longer sparse flames of

crocus-yellow, but iris and anemone and wild hyacinth : roses fell among them from the apron of a smiling dancer whose sly narrow eyes watched her, mocking, yet indulgent to her dreams.

CHAPTER X

AT a quarter to nine, having established his master at the breakfast-table, where Isaac was sitting firmly on a copy of that morning's *Times*, Gawkrodger collected dust-pan and broom and went upstairs to set the old nursery at the end of the passage in order for the day. He did not carry any coal or kindling wood with him as the fire had not been lit upstairs yesterday, Frome having gone off unexpectedly to Weston. He had caught the 11.15^{anc} *had* returned in the late afternoon in time to change before dining at the Vicarage. He had taken an attache-case with him : papers and drawings Gawkrodger had concluded, though what good they'd be to him in a seaside town with half its shops still closed for the winter and even the slot machines on the Front out of action, Gawkrodger was danged if he could make out. Last time he'd gone off in a hurry it had been to Avonhampton. There'd be book-shops and picture galleries and museums in a big place like Avonhampton, and a cinema in every other street for such as couldn't

amuse themselves sensibly. Gawkrodger had seen no cause for moithering his head about anybody's going to Avonhampton. Mr. Frome had to get his hair cut from time to time. It was high time now, come to that; but going into Weston and staying there best part of a day, and coming back with the curl in his hair as thick as ever was enough to make any chap think. He'd brought back nothing, hadn't Mr. Frome, so far as Gawkrodger could make out, and he'd *said* nothing. But, for one moment this morning, the master had looked at his man with a most unusual glint in his eye—almost as if he had got the better of him over something, though, once more, Gawkrodger would be danged if he could make out what it was.

Gawkrodger, like all tyrants, was a prey to suspicion. His attachment to Frome was compounded of habit, of domineering affection and of a middle-aged determination not to be ousted from a job in which he got more of his own way and less interference from women than he was likely to find in any other service. So long as Frome could be kept out of harm's way, and by harm Gawkrodger meant women in general and marriage as a major peril, Gawkrodger was safe. That Miss Wentworth had been a blessing in disguise, a proper eye-opener she was. It would take Mr. •Frome years to get over her. Not that

he fretted for her. More anger than sorrow it had been with Mr. Frome : righteous, manly anger such as he, Gawkrodger, had felt, and would go on feeling, against Mary Ellen, and, on her account, against the whole sex with the exception of Mrs. Frome—now in her grave—a lady if ever there was one, though even she had been tinged with the female inability to refrain from putting other people's business to rights. Even the best of them, said Gawkrodger to himself as he put down his dust-pan and brushes at the end of the passage, and that was saying precious few, had no sense.

Having lost the thread of the speculation with which he had begun his ascent from the kitchen in the familiar exercise of giving rein to his misogyny, Gawkrodger proceeded to put himself right with any sense of failure in his own life and conduct by deciding, as it was a fine morning, to sweep out one of the unoccupied rooms, a thing he had neglected to do for some time. As he'd not got a grate to do he could spare ten minutes for the job.

In the green-and-white bedroom his hasty sweeping discovered a litter of broken glass. Stooping to lift the curtain over the shelves along the wall he remembered that he had placed there, face downward, the photograph he had removed—and *twice*—from his master's

writing-table, when they were settling in. Someone had knocked it off its shelf to the uncarpeted floor—that there Isaac, of course. But Isaac couldn't have taken away all but the broken glass Gawkrodger swept into his dustpan. He looked along the floor beneath the curtain in case the cat had nosed and pawed the frame and its contents into a corner : but there was not even a footprint or the trace of a feathery tail in the light film of dust which had spread there since he had swept it out three weeks ago.

Gawkrodger shut the window, picked up his brush and pan, went out of the bedroom and locked the door behind him. He put the key in his pocket,

" Ah mun get to bottom o' this," he muttered as he made his way to the nursery.

Getting to the bottom of a mystery sometimes involves the diver in a deeper plunge than he has meant to take.

Propped up in the centre of the table, at the head of the blotting-pad, it faced Gawkrodger as he came in at the door: intact, with polished corners and shining, flawless glass, the frame he had supposed broken, the photograph he had been at such pains to hide.

For a third time in a quarter of an hour Gawkrodger said he'd be danged.

Slowly but angrily his generalised suspicion

revived and became particular. He had mistrusted this flimsy picture from the first minute he set eyes on it. Not even a proper photograph : a sort of imitation drawing it was ; messy he called it. What was his master, who was so pernickety over all the photographs he worked on, saying they must be hard and clear ; using a magnifying-glass on them to pick out the details (Gawkrodger had to polish that glass good and proper—he should know)—what was Mr. Frome, who despised the whole female sex and never left any photographs of their portraits lying about, doing with this one set right in middle of his work-table ? Why, he didn't even carry that miniature of Mrs. Frome old Mr. Frome had been so fond of about with him. It was stored with her jewellery in London.

He took the thing from its place and held it with an indignant thumb pressed hard on the glass : hard enough to break it. Not even a beauty she wasn't—just a gangling girl with her head on one side—a gormless creature who didn't properly ought to have had a photograph of herself taken at all. Why, the first time he'd seen it, down in the study that was, he'd put it out of sight, knowing how much his master disliked such things. The second time too, when he'd properly hidden it, on a shelf,-under a

curtain in an unused bedroom, in the unused wing—no, that was for another reason. It came back to him now as he saw how the face looked out of the frame, gazing beyond him, seeing its own vision. She wasn't so soft as she looked, this girl who had left her face behind her to disturb decent chaps who had their work to get on with. He knew their tricks. Looking as if they were half asleep in order to make a man think it would be fun to wake them. Fun ! Trouble was what she'd been after. He'd known it all along. What was the use of him keeping the place tidy and clean and cooking his best, so that his master should have peace and quiet, and saying " Not at home " to the Vicarage ladies when they'd made excuses for coming up to front door, when this thing was in the house, refusing to be hid, standing up as bold as brass in the very heart of the monkish seclusion from which it had been ousted once and again ?

Dangerous, that's what it was. Getting a photograph and setting it up where it could be looked at all day long. If he'd not left that there room unswept he'd have found it broken and made bold to take it to be reglazed himself. Then he could have left it at shop till it was time to put things ready for the owner's return. He'd have found a shop ... so that was what had

taken Mr. Frome to Weston—and only yesterday ! Happen he could thoil to get it broken again. He'd like to stamp on it and destroy the picture altogether, but the result would take some explaining ; even jealousy did not cloud his brain enough to hide that difficulty.

" Happen it'll have an accident," he said, " wi' doosting."

He propped the frame on the far corner of the table where there was not enough room for it. He had been trained not to displace a book or a paper, not to rearrange pen or pencil, inkwell, matchbox or ashtray once Frome had set his table in order. A feather brush, a blast of his own blowing, removed yesterday's dust and cigarette ash every morning. Deep cleaning was left till the work was done, or till, as had happened this time, his master shifted his quarters. It had happened twice—and each upheaval had followed the picture to its new hiding-place. Now it had been found for good. Not if Gawkrödger knew it. Shutting his eyes, as if to hide his own deceit from view, he lunged with the feather brush across to the corner where the frame was perched. It fell sharply to the floor.

" Ah was nobbut doosting/" said Gawkrödger, in rehearsal of the scene to come. He went round the table to pick up the pieces.

Whether it were that the picture fell flat; or

had been knocked down at an angle that caused it to hit the floor without much resistance; or because of the operation of that intermittent benevolence which seems, at times, to exert itself in foiling human mischief; or that the little picture-framer, in whose shop Frome had sat for three quarters of an hour yesterday, had done his work with peculiar skill, the result was clear. Gawkrodger, turning to inspect the ruin he had planned, picked up the object of his wrecking gesture to find it intact, looking, if anything, rather more firm and shining than it had done before its fall.

He put it back where he had found it. " Fair bewitched ! " he mumbled. " Fair bewitched ! "

He could do nothing against enchantment.

CHAPTER XI

SUSAN stayed on deck though the day was clouded and windy. She was crossing from Calais to Dover this time, and the French lady, to whose charge Mrs. Elmslie had quite unnecessarily confided her at the Gare du Nord that morning, had conceived it as part of the duty she had undertaken, to protect this *jeune fille* from draughts as well as from the gaze of predatory travellers, by keeping the windows up, and the blinds on the corridor side down, till she got out at Amiens. Then it was time to go to the restaurant car for luncheon, and no one could hope for a window to be let down in the restaurant car. Susan needed a great deal of fresh air by the time she reached the boat.

She had made this crossing several times before and she did not mind in the least doing it alone now. She had only one suitcase with her. It wasn't a suitcase so much as a small kit-bag which she had decided to take because, though more crumpling to an evening dress than a suitcase, it was just the right shape for the

diaphaenicon which lay on its flat side at the bottom of the bag, well padded with stockings and pyjamas and sponge-bags and the few things she would need for a couple of nights at Southernwood, until her trunk came through from Geneva.

She had left the books Simon Winter had given her to be sent on with her sports things—partly because they would have added weight to the bag she might have to carry off a crowded boat herself, and also because she wanted to forget about Simon. She knew now that she could buy an English edition of *Simonetta*. She would go up to London and buy it and books about the English Cathedrals, in that nice basement room of the book-shop in Clifford Street where the assistants knew so much and didn't mind how long you took looking through the shelves.

She had contrived to bring with her the facsimiles of the Dante drawings. They didn't weigh anything and they lay flat under the unicorn which she hadn't managed to show to Claud Baynes when she said goodbye to him, in company with a not-too-repentant Rita yesterday.

"Goth, Visigoth and Vandal, that's me," Rita said while they were dressing that morning, "but only a dyed-in-the-wool Hun would make Cathedrals an excuse for leaving young Marcel

and his injuries on my hands."

" But Rita—you have so much in common. Cat's and dancing and——"

" That's the point, my sweet. I was indicated."

" Rita !—you don't. . ."

" I don't—but I might have if— No, that's not true. I was a little pee-quay, like Morky when she's been done out of her afternoon off—because I didn't turn him down myself."

" Oh, Rita ! I felt so rude—saying No to him."

" That's where we differ, Miss Susan. Bless you!"

Rita had been very good in keeping the Elmslies at bay during the first part of the journey. After they'd changed trains at Coire, she and Susan had sat together in a seat to themselves, away from the young Elmslies, who were playing poker and making a good deal of noise while their mother dozed quietly in the heat of the train. It was raining by the time they ran along the embankment by the Wallenstadtersee, and Rita, looking out into the greyness, had sighed and said :

" Here's the spring you've been yearning for."

It was for quite another spring that Susan had longed ; but she had not told Rita this.

It seemed hard to believe, as the boat nosed its way out of Calais harbour, that this time yesterday they had all been lunching in the train together and she had not yet said goodbye to her mother and Rita, who had to hurry off when they reached Zurich to catch the afternoon train back to Geneva; back to Emilienne and to Basil and Tolo. Rita would by this time have forgotten her regret at leaving the snow and ice of the Engadine, in the reunion with her precious Alvis which had been overhauled for her while she was away. Their mother would have Tolo and Emilienne to fill all her mind. They couldn't possibly be thinking of her as she was thinking of them while she leaned on the rail of the boat and watched the grey-green water breaking into foam on either side of the prow.

Susan was glad that their thoughts were not following her and that she was free to cast off her thought of them as the boat had drawn its hawsers away on the quay-side ten minutes ago. She had not been alone with herself for a long time ; not since that night in the inn at Chiavenna before Marcel had come up for his *duvet*. In the train from Zurich to Paris she had played bezique with Mrs. Elmslie for part of the time and had spent hours and hours listening to Dan Elmslie's account of all the accidents on ice and snow which he himself had escaped by

reason of his own skill and daring. It was a relief when they had fallen into an argument over the relative merits of Fortnum and Mason's and Lillywhite's zip-fastened sports-wear and he had called in his sisters to support his own preference. She had spent the night in Paris at the Elmslie's hotel—a very noisy one near to the Gare du Nord. They had all gone out together to see the film of the moment and had arrived after the beginning and left before the end because Pamela Elmslie had felt sick, and was so at intervals for the rest of the evening, in consequence of having had every possible meal on every train they had been in since they had left St. Moritz at eight o'clock that morning.

The sea-wind was blowing the Elmslies away. Susan had not quite recovered from them in the train; even after the French woman had left her at Amiens ; even though she had opened both windows letting in almost as much cigar-smoke from the corridor as fresh air from the other side of the compartment.

It was worth it all; worth the upset with Marcel, and the horrid time with Rita; worth twenty-four hours of the Elmslies, to be alone now—and to be going—going—back to Southernwood of course. She did not begin to ask herself if it were really because she was returning to the school, where she had always

felt a little homesick, that her heart was so light, now that the French coast had vanished in the misty air behind her and there was only a greyness of sky and water through which she travelled. Her mind went back with self-reproach for having forgotten how marvellous her mother had been, and that she really wasn't so ashamed as she ought to feel for telling Claud Baynes about Marcel. You couldn't be ashamed of taking such good advice as his: he was a lamb. She liked him as much, more even, than she had liked Pierre Chapuisat. She hoped he'd have a lovely time in New York. She wouldn't mind his thoughts, if they were to follow her ; but of course they weren't doing anything of the sort. Her own thoughts would stretch out to him every time she looked at those lovely, lovely drawings packed away under the glass picture in the kit-bag she had left down in the ladies' saloon. She hadn't looked at those drawings since they had been really her own, after he had said she must keep them, now that they were friends. They were still in the large blue envelope she'd bought for them in the little *papeterie* that smelt of beeswax and turpentine when you went in to it out of the snow and the sun. Suddenly she felt she must look at them now, at once, before she got-back to England where they would

cease to remind her of Claud because they were part of the real reason why the leaden waves seemed to sparkle before her and she had so strong an assurance that the sun blazed above the obscuring clouds.

Because she could not yet quite dare to think without reserve of him himself she made the thought of Claud an anteroom to the place she must enter alone—soon—but not now. Claud had known him; he had spoken of him, not with enmity, as Simon Winter had done ; not angrily with the lies and resentment that had warned her against believing a word Joyce Wentworth had said, but simply and kindly and justly, as one to whom friendship is not dead because it has not been continuous. She thought of a sentence she had copied out in a space left below a poem on the blank leaves of the book she had left in her room at home : *Passion grounded on confession of excellence outlives hope*. Passion meant love; Claud had confirmed her own confession of excellence ; hope could not die because it had never been born. She did not hope, she waited: she had known she was waiting for something that would happen, not to, but in herself, before Claud's question had shown her what it was. She would wait a little longer till she was in some most beautiful place alone, having escaped

perhaps from her school friends, in the little stone room on the wall at Ely; or standing under the lantern of the cathedral again as she had done two years ago; or perhaps looking up into the branches of the wild cherry tree at the edge of the tennis courts at Southernwood—it would be in bloom in April. . . . She would wait for the time and the place—and then she would look at what she was keeping in her heart. Now she would think of Claud and his kindness—not the rose, but near it. . . .

They were out in mid-Channel. The wind had changed and was blowing capfuls of rain across the boat. Susan began to feel cold. She had left her fur coat below with her kit-bag and was still wearing the long, oatmeal-coloured one that had been more than enough for the train journey, the coat she had travelled in on the way out six months ago.

She went down to the saloon. The sight of her kit-bag, bulging a little at the sides because of all the things she had used to wedge her picture, made her suddenly want to look at the drawings. There was still a good half-hour left before they could reach Dover. Even if, in repacking, she did have to stuff odds and ends into her pocket in order to get the bag done up again, it wouldn't matter. Miss Van der Mayne's answer -to her mother's telegram had said,

" Sending car to meet boat-train "—she'd be all right once she had got off the boat.

The blue envelope came out quite easily and Susan was able to repack the bag at once. She found a quiet corner behind a pile of someone else's luggage which sheltered her from the spectacle of other passengers lying at full length on the padded seats under the port-holes, and drew the stiff glazed sheets out of the blue envelope.

There were six of them, printed in sepia with faint colour-washes added by hand. Almost facsimiles of the real drawings—identical in size except for a small margin showing where the plates had ended. Here and there the margins of the originals had been broken or worn into slight serrations : the corner of one was missing ; the inscriptions, some in Greek lettering she could not read, others in an almost indecipherable Italian, had in one or two cases been corrected in a darker ink and by another hand. Susan found these details almost as entrancing as the pictures themselves. She was so absorbed in the study of them that she did not notice the bells and hooters announcing the boat's arrival in port. The stewardess had to warn her of it.

Thrusting the blue envelope into a pocket of her woollen coat, where it fitted so tightly that she could feel its stiffness against her side, she

threw her fur coat over one arm and, taking her kit-bag in the other hand, went on deck. The sun was shining now. She had come home out of the mist. Soon, soon she would let herself know why she was so happy.

The gangways were already fixed when she reached them and took up her place, almost the last of the crowd of passengers who were beginning to disembark. Almost but not the last of all. As she put down her kit-bag in order to get her landing ticket out of the inner pocket of her coat, a voice behind her said :

" Good morning, stepchild."

The bubble of joy in which she had been floating broke and left her afraid in the cold sunlight.

" Oh ! " she said. " How ? ... why ? "

" By the usual ways—for the usual reasons," he beamed, " but it is a coincidence ! What have you been doing all this time ? "

" Ski-ing," said Susan inaccurately.

" I don't believe it. You lack the ruddy glow acquired on the snowfields."

" I meant skating," said Susan.

" You shouldn't lie about trifles. It cramps the style for real emergencies."

" I was startled," said Susan furiously.

" You lack practice," he said. " Are you alone ? "

" Yes," said Susan, and wished she *had* lied this time.

" So ! Then we can travel up to London together. That will be a perfect end to an imperfect experience. But, I forgot, you are a good sailor."

" I . . ." began Susan, and then checked herself. She wasn't going to tell a lie, even to him, but she could act one for a few minutes.

A gust of wind blew his cloak across her knees.

" You see," he said, " Zephyrus encourages our reunion."

Susan tried to move away from him and slipped on an end of rope. They had come within a few feet of the gangway now. Other late-comers were behind them. She must bear it a few minutes longer.

" Will you," he said, " be the perfect step-daughter and carry these papers for your aged relative ? I can't find my pocket-book."

Without waiting for her reply he thrust the *Illustrated London News* and the *Taller* into the crook of the arm on which she carried her fur coat.

" I shall have to look after my handbags," he explained. " We'll meet at the train—in the Pullman. I booked two seats there when I saw you at Calais."

Susan couldn't help wondering why, as he

had known she was on the boat, he had waited until now before speaking to her. It was odd that she hadn't seen him herself. The boat was crowded, but that hat and cloak were not easily missed. He might have gone below at once. He had spoken as though he were not a good sailor. The sea had been like a mill-pond all that September night, before she had met him on deck looking at the sunrise. In any case it didn't matter. She was on the gangway now. He didn't seem to be behind her. He had let two rather tottering old ladies get in front of him. One of them smelt strongly of the brandy she had taken. Susan looked round quickly. There was a tall, stout man behind the old ladies: she couldn't even see the peak of Simon's hat behind his broad shoulders. Susan had never felt an impulse to push in front of anyone before, but she did so now. If she could give up her ticket before Simon Winter could catch up with her he would not notice that she was not going to travel by the London train.

It was done. She had slithered one place further from him. He had lost sight of her.

The Southernwood chauffeur was on the quay.

" I've spoken to one of the Customs men, Miss," he said, taking her kit-bag. " If you'll follow me he'll mark you out at once."

Susan had never been particularly grateful for her travelling status as one of the girls at the famous Kentish school, whose luggage was passed so readily when they came back from holidays abroad. She had indeed never noticed what happened to it on other occasions when—as now—the benevolent and capable man who met the boat had taken charge of it. Now, as they made a perfunctory stay at the wooden bench in the customs room, she held her breath for fear that, for once, the protection of being a schoolgirl might fail and she be made to open her bag and held there until Simon could find her again. What a mercy that she had not brought a trunk with her ; that she had come away in haste ; that her mother's loving-kindness in letting her go quickly had extended so much farther than either of them could have foreseen.

But there was no hitch. The customs officer passed her without question. In three minutes she was leaning back in the Southernwood car, her kit-bag in front with the chauffeur, her fur coat bundled together at her side.

As they climbed the hill to Dover Castle Susan hugged herself with pleasure at the idea of Simon and his two reserved seats in the tea-car—looking for her all up and down the platform—and, perhaps, even missing the train

in his search. Then she remembered the papers he had asked her to carry for him. It couldn't matter much that he had lost them. It was his own fault. He could buy others if there was anything of particular interest to him in either of them. She would give them to the chauffeur when they reached Southernwood. She remembered how she had gone off with a far more valuable piece of Simon's property last time they had landed from a Channel boat. Her dislike of him subsided. If it had not been for Simon—no, that was not true. One day, somehow, she would have found that book herself. It was hers—it belonged to her—the world was not wide enough to separate her from her own.

There was a jerk—the car swerved to one side. A motor cyclist was careering downhill at full speed, hooting as he came. Susan's coat slipped from the seat and the thick-leaved periodicals fell open on the floor. As she stooped to pick them up an A.A. man and a police officer appeared on each side of the road. The cyclist's career was cut short. There was a great deal of angry talking. Notebooks were produced. The chauffeur was explaining that the young lady inside was not the owner of the car. Susan knew that all she had to do, since no harm had been done except to the tempers of all the four men

outside, was to sit still and wait until the disturbance was over.

She would look at one of Simon's papers till they were ready to move on again.

As she began to pick them up two loose sheets fell from between their leaves. There seemed to be several more of these. She took the *Taller* and dislodged three. A sixth flapped from the corner of one of the advertisement pages of the *Illustrated London News*, to which it had been lightly fastened by the simple expedient of damping the glazed paper. It broke away, and Susan, catching it as it fell, was aware of the crackle of dried vellum between her thumb and fingers.

She knelt on the floor of the car and spread the sheets she had found on the seat before her. Half an hour ago she had believed that the reproductions, now packed together in the pocket of her coat, were so perfect that the originals could hardly excel them : but, as she laid each piece of vellum by the side of its fellow, some subtlety of line she could not distinguish; an unreproducible quality in texture and shade; the direct, uninterpreted impact of curves, traced four hundred years ago by a hand which had been warm on the vellum where her own fingers glowed and trembled today, informed her ignorance that here, indeed, and for the first time, she beheld

the actual work of the master who, except for a few stolen minutes in the Louvre, at a time when she knew little of him but his name, she had known so far only at third hand in those reproductions of reproductions illustrating the books she had read.

The first shock of pleasure was followed by one of alarm. As clearly as if a voice had spoken she knew what Simon Winter had done ; why he had hidden in the shadows of that grim little shop in Lecco ; with what unscrupulous cunning he had used his chance encounter with her to ensure that his device for carrying his loot ashore undetected should be made safer by her. Nobody would suspect an English girl, who still looked like a schoolgirl, of smuggling art treasures of incalculable value, hidden in the pages of two magazines. Not even wrapped up—only just fixed enough between the glossy papers not to fall out unless, and until, they were jerked, as the stopping of the car had just jerked them.

For the first time in her life Susan was really angry. It was so new a sensation that she supposed she was going to be ill; she felt hot and cold; there was a buzzing in her ears; dark moons floated before her eyes ; she could feel the beating of her heart; she wanted to scream.

" Beg pardon, Miss. I hope you are not hurt."

The chauffeur, who, after a first backward glance which had shown his passenger, apparently intact and calm on the seat of the car, had been too busy to look at her during the ensuing five minutes, was peering anxiously through the window.

" No," said Susan, still seated on the floor of the car. " It's all right, Simpson, I'm just picking up these papers. Are you all right ? Has the car got bent ? "

" One of the mud-guards is a bit buckled, Miss, but nothing to matter. We'll be off in a couple of minutes now. The policeman is going to hold up the traffic while I get her round. Nasty corner for turning."

The man went round to the back of the car where a small crowd had collected. He was kept there for more than the two minutes he had set as a limit, by a local reporter who had had the good fortune to be coming up the hill just in the nick of time to realise the news value of what might have been a really splendid accident.

The interruption had changed the quality of Susan's anger. What had been a red-hot vortex was now a hard flame in which she saw clearly and thought with swiftness and precision. When Simon realised that she had given him the slip he would pounce on her track: go to Mr. Vulliamy; telegraph to. Basil in

Geneva ; find out, before nightfall, where she had gone. He would *have* to get those drawings back. She would *have* to give them to him if he found her. If he found her . . . The person to whom those drawings must be given—the person who had been accused of stealing them—who had hidden himself away in the country because he couldn't bear being suspected of such a mean and selfish crime—was the only person who would know how to circumvent that wicked little man.

Susan's desire was conscious now : it stirred her subconscious memory. Other people who had looked up trains when she had travelled by them, now, rose, eager helpful ghosts, helping to make her wish take on the aspect of an urgent duty. It was not yet two o'clock. There was a train from Paddington to Bristol at 5.15. She could go by the local line to the junction—and by the narrow-gauge railway up the valley. The ancient station taxi would be roused from its lair. She would not telegraph to Ripley lest, by some horror of anxious motherliness, Mrs. Adderley should have done the same thing, or Mr. Vulliamy should have suggested it to Simon. She must get to Maze House by herself—without warning—without delay. If Simon telegraphed to Geneva they would answer that she was with Miss Van der

Mayne. She must not let Miss Van der Mayne know where she had gone.

" Everything's O.K., Miss," said the chauffeur's voice. He was in his seat again and had pushed back the glass.

" Oh, Simpson," said Susan with an authority which surprised and exhilarated her enormously, " I want you to drop me at Dover Town station. I've got to get up to London by the next train. I've just found some important papers belonging to someone else which must be delivered tonight." That was true. She wouldn't tell any more lies than she could help.

" I'll give you a note for Miss Van der Mayne."

The man hesitated for a moment. But the young lady was not any longer a pupil at Southernwood : it was not within his province to prevent her changing her plan.

" You can take my bag up to the house," said Susan in an inspired breath. " And my coat. I shall get back as soon as possible."

That settled it. If he turned up with such evidence that he had met Miss Susan Adderley, he could not be blamed for not producing her person.

" Very good, Miss," he said, and began to turn the car.

CHAPTER XII

I

THE telegram was for Gawkrodger. When he had read it twice he said :

" Yo'll have to wait wile Friday to get yore hair cut."

" How's that ? " asked Frome.

" Ah always did say Ah'd go to Mary Ellen Gawkrodger's funeral and it's been fixed for Wednesday at four. It'll tak' me best part o' Thursday to get back here."

" Sorry you've had bad news, Gawkrodger."

" There's nobbut one thing bad about it, and that's oopset for you."

" Oh, I can manage very well by myself. I dare say Mrs. Ripley could come up from the lodge and give me some food."

" She will that, and talk yor head off while she's about it."

" Better have a little extra cash. It's a good stiff fare up to Yorkshire from here."

" Nay, lad ! Ah'm going on bike. Ah'm not

wun to sit twiddling ma thumbs i' railway carriages, throng wi' folks, at a time like this."

The broadening of Gawkrodger's speech was a sign that he was troubled by the news, but Frome knew better than to offer him further sympathy.

" I'll work in the study while you're away," he said. " It will make things simpler for Mrs. Ripley."

2

At the station Susan changed her mind.

" I think I'll take my bag with me, Simpson," she said, " in case I don't get back tonight. Here's the letter for Miss Van der Mayne."

" Very good, Miss," said Simpson, but he felt a little uneasy. When he looked at the tip she had given him just as the train was about to move out of the station he raised his eyebrows. It was a five-pound note. It would not be the first time that one of the young ladies had tried to buy his connivance in some escapade : but, after ten years' service at Southernwood, he thought he knew enough about character and probability to be sure that the younger of the Adderley girls would not turn out to be one of those. ... If it had been Miss Rita now. . . . He wondered as he drove back to the school whether he ought to say anything to Miss Van der Mayne.

He decided not to do this unless he were questioned. He had the evening off. He would send in the girl's letter with her fur coat by one of the maids, and go straight down to the flicks. Whatever she might be up to, he'd give the girl a fair chance. She wasn't the kind to get kidnapped. Too tall for one thing, and obviously of the protected classes. Besides, if there'd been any funny business she'd have given him the slip at Dover. Good luck to her, anyhow.

In the train from Dover to Victoria Susan counted her money and realised what she had done. She had been given between seven and eight pounds in exchange for her French and Swiss money on the boat and had meant to give Simpson the only ten-shilling note which still lay in her pocket-book, brick-red beside its green companion. She had used all but a shilling of her silver change for a ticket to London. She had exactly thirty-one shillings left. Always, for the journey home from school, she had been given three pounds—two for her tickets to and from London, and the rest for tips and the taxi between the two London termini.

Thirty-one shillings would not get her any further than Bristol. The fare to the junction was twenty-seven shillings and a penny. She and Rita had always been careful to have that

penny in hand when they allowed for Punch and Penguin books and picture postcards at Paddington.

" I shall," said Susan to herself, " I shall just have to travel third ! And I simply must have something to eat."

She felt extremely brave and self-reliant at having reached this solution of her financial problem. In a way it seemed to justify what she was doing ; it made her motive for doing it more real to be facing hardship on her journey.

A phrase from the *Vita Nuova* which she had copied out in Italian under one of the Shakespeare sonnets, came back to her in the translation someone had made of it:

The lordship of Love is not good became the more fidelity his liegeman beareth to him, so much the heavier and more grievous trials he must needs endure.

It would not be a very heavy trial to travel third. She wished she had had the sense to do so from Dover. She went back to the beginning of the quotation : *The lordship of Love is good_y in that it withdraweth the inclination of his liegeman from all base things.* How did it go in Italian—Dante's Italian, not the shopping kind ?

Buona & la signoria d'Amore . . .

" Yes, Miss ? " said the porter, who had held open the door of the taxi quite long enough.

3

Frome threw two logs on the fire. It was not cold, but he had done little work all day and meant to make a night of it, now that Mrs. Ripley had gone at last and would not again tap at the door and cough and cry "hem" and ask him if he were sure he had everything he needed and whether she oughtn't to put a hot-water bottle in his bed, as she had done yesterday—twice, before he had persuaded her to leave the house.

Women ! thought Frome. Women ! Fussy as to material comfort; unable to leave any man in peace; clamouring; insatiable. As he thought, muttering with disdain, he leaned his elbows on the table and waited for the peace he needed to reach him again, as it had for three days now, in the pictured face whose eyes might at any moment turn from their dream and meet his own.

There had been no subterfuge ; no dispute about its place where, any time he looked up from the page he was writing, he could see it again. The intervals thus spent grew more frequent—and longer: at each of them the sense that he was waiting for an event soon to disclose itself was more definite. Isaac, who lay curled on the hearth, waited also: his expectation

was more assured: he was awake and aware: he watched without impatience. A minute, an hour were to him of equal duration in time, known to cats by other measurements than those imposed by man on his mortal, futile impatience.

The little anthology lay within reach of Frome's hand. He had brought it with him when he had carried the photograph down to the study that morning. He knew that it was interleaved and annotated on many pages. The faint line against the opening verse of *Aire and Angelh* was not the only clue to the mind of the girl who had traced it. She had added other poems of her own selection to the verses about the unicorn he had found on the last pages of the book. Some of these were not altogether worthy of the honour she had done to them, their imperfections had escaped the criticism of a taste still in process of growth: but none was without its charm "or poignancy, the grace of a tender thought, or a haunting phrase.

He leant back in his chair and took up the book once more. On one blank page she had written out the poem beginning " Very old are the hills/" which the Vicar had quoted to him, saying she knew it by heart when she was a child. Below it, in different coloured ink, as if making a comment on its beauty, she had set four lines from another poem by the same writer :

*'Tis the immortal thought
Whose passion still
Makes of the changing
The unchangeable.*

It was the verse he had wished to set as a chapter heading to *Simonetta*, the book which he might have, which he *had*_y written about her.

He turned back to an early page and read :

*So she became a bird and bird-like danced
On a long sloe-bough, treading the silver
blossom
With a bird's lovely feet ;
Till shaken blossoms fell into the hands
Of Sunlight. And he held them for a moment
And let them drop.
And_y in the autumn, Procne came again
And leapt upon the crooked sloe-bough singing.
And the dark berries winked like earth-dimmed
beads_y
As the branch swung beneath her dancing feet.*

Her annotation to this was a soft, biscuit-coloured feather thrust through a slit in the paper—downy, from the breast of a nightingale.

4

" How far can I go for a pound and six-pence? V

The man at the booking office had said that, if she could make it ninepence, there was a train stopping at Quirral Road at 8.53.

She would have to leave her bag with the porter, who was also booking-clerk and station-master at Quirral Road. She knew him quite well. She and Rita often walked the three miles between that wayside halt and the top of the lane that led down from the moor to Maze House when they wanted to catch the little train that ran up and down the valley. It would be dark, but she could follow the cart-track up to the level turf, and then the moon she had seen through the windows of the night train to Paris would be up and she could run, as she had so often run by daylight, across the open moor to the fence round the little coppice on its western edge.

It would be lonely; but not dangerous, not really difficult, not difficult enough: . . . *so much the heavier and more grievous trials* . . .

5

Under the eight short lines of a poem like a sigh by Mary Coleridge she had written :

*Gestern lieb' ich,
Heute kid' ich,*

*Morgen sterV ich.
Dennoch denk' ich
Heut' und morgen
Gern an gestern.*

When had the child recognised this nostalgia for a passion she could not yet have experienced ? Did some melancholy cadence in her blood flow in time with the sobbing consolation of Lessing's verse ? Had she, in her adolescent awakening, gathered courage to accept without regret the loss that might so easily befall her—the disillusionment he himself had faced—the pain he himself might bring to her—one day ?

6

She had slept for two hours. An apple and a sandwich, eaten in the refreshment-room before she bought her ticket, had been a great help. When she got into the local train she was cheered by its familiar ramshackle air: once it had started on its quaking progress she knew the name of every station at which it halted until she got out at Quirral Road. Even though she was travelling third she had the carriage to herself and was able to change into the pair of walking shoes she had brought with her.

The night air was cool and soft about the

wooden platform and the porter did not grumble at having to unlock the booking office to put away her handbag, though he had already closed it for the night. He offered her a spare lantern for her walk.

" I don't think I need it, Collins," she said.
" The moon is coming up."

" There's many as would carry ur to scare sheep."

" They'll be scared by my coat. It looks almost white in the darkness."

" They do say there be pixies up the moor," he urged.

" They'll show me the way," she said.

With one hand thrust into the deep pocket, pressed against the envelope that now held the precious originals, as well as her own copies of them, she began to climb the lane. She had never been so happy as this in all her life.

7

A double sheet of notepaper had been fastened by a thread of yellow silk between the sections of the Anthology headed Life and Love, and Death. On it an older hand than hers had written, in a spidery foreign script, in ink which had faded from violet to brown, a poem called *Attente*.

*J'ai parfois cet espoir en qui fat cru longtemps,
Qu'un soir, ay ant songe comme je suis loin d'elle^
L'dme et le corps troubles de mon amour fiddle,
Elk viendra vers mot qui souffre et qui Vattends.*

*II serait tard ; le feu mourait en cendre grise ;
La chambre serait pleine encore dune tiedeur,
J'aurais connu de loin son pas et son odeur ;
J'attendrais san y croire, et pourtant sans
surprise.*

*Elle entrerait, d'avance ayant tout accepte,
Rtsignee et docile ou mon amour Ventraine
Elle aurait dans les yeux la tendresse sereine
Qui se donne humblement comme une chariti.*

*Elle ne dirait rien. Sur mon epaule heureuse
Elle viendrait poser son front, las du chemin
Sa main d'enfant craintif tremblerait dans ma
main ;
Elle me sourirait de se sentir peureuse.*

*Je lui parlerais d'elle avec des mots tr&s doux,
Et puts de mon attente et de ma solitude :
Mon desir console fondrait en gratitude,
Et la lampe serait paisible autour de nous.*

His heart beat furiously. It was not possible that any other man but himself could have known—could have written this :

*// serait tard, le feu mourait en cendre grise . . .
Je parlerai de mon attente et de ma solitude. . . .*

He pushed back his chair and, going to the window, threw it open. A light wind rustled in the trees ; clouds scudded over the sky, dappling the night-white grass with the passage of their shadows. Almost he saw veiled, unearthly Graces dancing on the lawn. Something brushed against his ankles. On soundless feet Isaac had gone out into the moonlight.

8

The wind on the moor was with her. It held her softly by the shoulders, pushing her on her way. It blew in the folds of her coat making them sails to aid her passage. The owls, hooting in the woods beyond the moor, guided her with their hollow signals. When she stooped under the rail of the fence round the coppice in order to cut through that way and reach the garden gate more quickly, a low bough took her hat and loosened the coil of her hair that there might be no doubt in whose image she would come to him out of the darkness. She went forward, more swiftly now that she was safe on the paths she had trodden in childhood. A shaft of light across the garden showed her where she would find haven :

*. . . h feu mourait en cendre grise ...
La chambre serait pleine encore (Tune ttideur ..
Et la lampe serait paisible autour de nous.*

9

He had gone back into the room and was standing with bent head by the fireplace when she saw him: pale—with closed lips, and a long, delicate, scornful profile; silent and waiting with dark hair curling above his ears; tall, brave—incorruptible, the man whose good name she had come to vindicate.

He raised his eyes and saw her, white against the darkness, her yellow hair falling across her shoulders, not yet smiling—drifting towards him, holding something in her hands.

" I've brought them to you/¹ she said. " The *Vita Nuova* drawings. I always knew they would be found."

True lo intendimento del suo fedele da tutte le vilicose.

Her words had no meaning for him because of her voice and her eyes. He went to meet her and took her hands in his. The blue envelope fell to the floor between them.

" You ! " he said. " You ! "

WINCHESTER
January-April 1938

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by K. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, Edinburgh.

NEW NOVELS

THE JOYFUL DELANEYS. By HUGH
WALPOLE. 8s. 6d.

GROWTH OF A MAN. By MAZO DE LA
ROCHE. 7s. 6d.

AN END OF THE HOURS. By EDWARD
THOMPSON. 7s. 6d.

LATE SUMMER. By LADY WILSON.
. 8s. 6d.

LOVE AT THE MISSION. By R. HERNEKIN
BAPTIST. 7s. 6d.

DOUBLE OR QUILTS. By G. MARCH-
PHILLIPPS. 7s. 6d. (*Provisional title*),

NINA LESSING. By EDWARD CRANKSHAW.
•7s. 6d.

THE DARK ROOM. By R. K. NARAYAN.
6s.

(All prices are net)

MA'CMILLAN AND CO. LTD., LONDON

NOVELS BY NAOMI ROYDE SMITH

FOR US IN THE DARK

8s. 6d.

"She attains at times almost classic heights of power."—*Frank Swinnerton (Observer)*

"Undeniably exciting. . . . There are some splendidly staged scenes and one or two very shrewd portraits/*—*Ralph Straus (Sunday Times)*

MISS BENDIX

4s. 6d.

" . . . A beautiful piece of writing."—*Kate O'Brien (Spectator)*

"An exquisite example of her skill/'—*R. Ellis Roberts (News Chronicle)*

ALL STAR CAST

3s. 6d.

"A brilliant piece of work/'—*Douglas West (Daily Mail)*

"Original in conception, brilliant in handling."—*Punch*

JAKE

3s. 6d.

"An exciting and distinguished novel."—*Times Literary Supplement*

"Told with exquisite grace and skill. . . . A tale which for human interest is outstandingly interesting."—*Douglas West (Daily Mail)*

(All prices are net)

MACMILLAN AND CO. LTD., LONDON

